Fallen Rain

ARGUS 2015




Fallen Rain
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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank dedicated writers and artists who submitted their work. Published or not, we evoke feeling in others and increase the quality of life through offering products of our talents to society. Without you all, this literary and art magazine would not be possible. It has truly been a pleasure to read and publish your work.

Furthermore, my editorial staff exhibited great focus and determination while aiding the publishing of this issue. They rose to each occasion, eager and ready to help. I could not have chosen a more fitting staff and I have enjoyed your company on this project.

Likewise, thank you judges for volunteering your time. The efforts you have put into this issue are greatly appreciated. I am so pleased with the high quality of this issue and I owe that to you.

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Editor's Notes

Dear Reader,

I would like to start out by thanking you for the commitment of reading this magazine. Many laborious hours went into its creation, but I do not see the process as a burden; more like a service to my loyal readers. This opportunity to captivate your minds is more valuable than any amount of money. The privilege of sharing a piece of myself with you through this literary work, truly touches my heart. I based the concept behind this entire issue on a subject matter that we can all relate with. As college students and alumni, we face many obstacles and trials that simply cannot be avoided. We face ourselves and the difficult truth of taking off our blinders and seeing ourselves for who we are: perfectly imperfect people. But in the midst of our unstable lives and internal madness one can find beauty in lessons learned, strength gained, and positive situations blooming after the rain has stopped. Fallen Rain represents the balance of positive and negative in our lives that we struggle with daily. I hope with each artwork and literary piece you can find comfort in others feeling similarly and find the motivation to push forward. For every storm, there are always puddles left behind, and Fallen Rain is a salute to all those that slip on their rain boots and raincoats and jump right in!

Contest Winners

Poetry:
1st Place- De La Soul (Amerikkka) by Matthew Mims
2nd Place- My Privy Universe by James Lewis Huss
3rd Place- Harvest by Elizabeth King
Honorable Mention- The Conversation by Renae Sirles

Fiction:
1st Place- Neighborhood Kids by Meredith Prochaska
2nd Place- Jacek by Gene Ferrier
3rd Place- Sweet Dreams by Nicolas Fry

Non-Fiction:
1st Place- Barstow, Texas 1941 by Amanda James
2nd Place- My Mental Disorder by Aimee Calmes
3rd Place- A Jewel in the Crown by Ashton Ebarb

Photography:
1st Place- Unseen by Tra'Van Cooper
2nd Place- Gold by Heather Mathis
3rd Place- Details Aren't Important by Kaitlyn Albert
Honorable Mention- Close and Personal by Allen Allemand

Fine Arts:
1st Place- Child at Heart by Jacklyn Marr
2nd Place- Observe by Richelle Dorris
3rd Place- Vinnie by Hannah Fulton
Honorable Mention- Anonymous by Tyra Morrison

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Sinking

Delores Atkins

I've been smiling too long.
Long enough to make people believe the lies between my cheeks.
Letting them fall into the deceit that is my happily ever after attitude.
Lips constantly upward, chasing off any notion that problems are on my mind.
I've been laughing too long.
Noise starts off as wails,
Cries for help that get tongue-tied before they reach my teeth and rip through my image,
Like a tidal wave of what is actually going on behind the curtains of this house.
Painting rainbow pictures over my window eyelids so no one will see
The ocean inside with enough depth to make you feel consumed by just staring at it.
No, hope can't float down this way.
I've poked too many holes in that theory so don't tell me that everything is okay.
That I'll be just fine, why don't you try fixing the lie before you try strapping floaties to me.
Remember that this isn't some four year old in the kiddie pool.
This is the captain calling to let you know the Titanic is sinking
And if you know what's best then strap on your life vest and pray for

the warmth of heaven,
Because hell is surely cold.
It's freezing in forehead-deep water with no sign of anyone hearing
when your lungs give out.
As the water rushes in so fast that there's no way to be prepared for the
intake.
As it rapes your throat raw;
Seeking out the fire deep in the pits of your stomach and silencing you
Making you wish this was a *Bay Watch* episode so someone can come
and breathe for you.
Place their hands on your chest in an attempt to put feeling back into
you.
I've been drowning so long in it I can't remember what it's like to want
for air.
Want for these hydrogens to detach their grip on oxygen long enough
to feel like I'm a human.
Or perhaps long enough to move my system from below sea level.
I told you, I've been smiling too long.
Lying to the people around me that think I'm just fine.
But what hurt the worst wasn't when they bought the lie.
But when I thought it was real, my damn self.

All of This

Samantha Rohr

I tried to delete you from my life,
But people don't disappear
as easily as wiping away a dry erase marker,
or pressing a big red button.
They don't always leave
as quickly as that blue Mustang that drove down my street 20 minutes ago.
No, People linger
like the smell of well-worn shoes or dirty laundry.
They stick around
like the spaghetti sauce your little cousin
spat on the wall two months ago
that you can't seem to scrub clean
no matter how many times a day you try.
It's become a part of the wall,
inseparable, bonded forever.

People like you are the spaghetti sauce of my life.
You fling yourself at me and every day I fight,
trying to scrub you away.
I pour alcohol down my throat,

raw from screaming to cleanse myself of your name,
I fast, I vomit stomach acid, I scream,
I drown myself in water, I throw things,
I bathe 3 times a day to wash the smell of you off my battered body.

I feel you on my skin like rain water,
especially when you're not there,
falling ever so softly, but cold as the windows in December.
No towel can dry my rain-soaked body of your memory.
Fate spat you in my direction and now you have become a part of me,
inseparable, bonded forever.
I'll wake at night in a puddle of your words and wonder
Why Me?
You could pick any girl in the world.
Why did you choose Me?
I talk to walls, I scream at nothing,
I don't sleep, I bite my nails until you can't see them,
I spend hours in a fetal position trying to get the strength to stand.
All of this,
because I wanted to be loved.

Unsightly King

Stephanie Allen

Hail to the power
That births a high
Conception began at a lie
For it was his pride & joy
To have his servants /click here /and look there
No one could stop his reign /this time
His twisted words, intertwine with his creative mind
Gaining followers with dog-hungry minds
And spreading ungodliness like monstrous vines
Attack following attack /following attack
The knight that once braved him with all her might
Could no longer withstand the bloodstained nights
The king's followers continued his quest
Until Criss could no longer resist
Due to the Unsightly King
She'll always be known as "Criss the Hanging Queen"

A Poor Man's Sarah

Tiffany Burke

A poor man's distraction
Attention, retraction from the real
Deal, a steal of a moment—
Closed in like he owns it and the phone's it
Because she wants it and him
But they're just friends at best
With fantasy benefits
She's the rest of what's left
A poor man's distress
Or a damsel dangling from the dagger in her heart
It starts to bleed, he darts and leaves
Leaving footprints that might fade away
—But stay, she'll be
A poor man's today
And at the end of tomorrow her sorrow will eclipse
The glimpse of him gone for good
Maybe he should so she would move on
And decide to no longer be a poor man's—
Anything

Sweet Dreams

Nicolas Fry

I'm paralyzed. Nothing I will allow my body to do works or feels like it is nonexistent. I can feel the cold sweat dotting my skin. The sheets have been tossed off of me at some point. The entire time I can hear the laughter of a voice not my own, or any that I can recognize. I inhale, sucking in all the air I can through clenched teeth. It feels like the voice is laughing behind me, above me, next to me, in me. The voice grows in volume, it begins to roar in my ears like an ocean tide. Goddammit, I need to move. I let the breath out and I can feel my arms move to push off the bed.

Finally, movement. The voice is gone, it faded and the roaring in my ears subsided. Now I'm sitting on the edge of the bed, my bare feet touching the wood floor. A digital clock flashes twelve on and off. The blinking red light illuminates my hands with each pulse. I sigh, the power must have flickered while I slept. A groan comes from behind my back. I turn around to see my wife sleeping behind me. She's cocooned in the blankets. A nervous smile twitches its way across my lips.

I'm in my late twenties, married, have a kid, and I teach English at a high school. Nothing should scare me at this point in my life, yet I still have nightmares. Not the typical ones that involve a child or some ominous dream of a dying family member. I have the same nightmare every time. It's always dark and I'm walking down a path lit by dimming lamps. I can hear this neighing and it sends me into a panic. The whole path becomes a blur as I take off running. Each light goes out the moment I run past. The whinny of a horse turns into a guttural laughter, something evil. I don't have to look behind me to know it's

grinning there, a jagged maw gnashing while it laughs. I always wake up before I stumble, but not tonight. I fell in the dream and turned to see the horse barreling down on me. Its long face twisted into a grotesque grin that had no place on a horse. That laugh sends chills down my spine.

Then I was awake, sitting here on the edge of my bed with a blinking red clock. Twelve. Twelve. Twelve. Hello. What? I rub my eyes and grab the clock. I could swear it just read hello. I run my hand back over the nightstand and grab my phone. The screen glows to life illuminating my hands and face. One thirty-six. Four hours and I have to be up, getting ready for work. I scratch my nose and lower the phone, the bright screen brushing the ceiling, to the door, to the back end of a horse walking out through my bedroom door. The phone slips from my hand and rattles to the floor. I swear I can hear a faint laughter. *Breathe, just breathe*. My wife lets out a soft moan and mumbles something.

"Nothing, just go back to sleep." My eyes are locked on the door, I can make out faint shapes in the dark. Fingers scratch blind against the floor, searching for my only source of light. One finger brushes the glassy surface and it slides right out from under the bed. I pull it up to my face, unlock it, and flick on a flashlight application. At least this thing is worth something now. The phone becomes propped up by the blinking clock, casting a pale light on the doorway and darkening the shadows around me. I pull on a pair of pants and grab the phone to walk out into the hallway. I can see a horsetail flick back and forth as it clops its way down the hall. The face turns back to me, half rotted with each eye glowing a putrid yellow, and its grey flesh is torn in some places with black ichor, oozing from the tears. The rotted side crumples into a freakish grin, the horse face contorting into a grin, its mouth widening and sinking into itself. I can feel my stomach drop into a pool of ice as it turns into my son's room.

"No!" My voice echoes through the house as I charge down through the hallway. I lunge out for the horse tail, only to watch it dissipate. My son is in his bed and the door slams shut in my face, the wood cracking against my forehead. I can see small flashes of black and white lines flittering across my vision. Everything is spinning and I'm on my knees. It feels like there is blood, but nothing is there. I manage to stand back up and wrap fingers around the doorknob. It twists, but it locks up and a grinding noise begins. Thousands of voices seem to be screeching and wailing as I turn the knob. I try to push through the sounds, but it's too much on top of my already spinning head. My hands come up to slap over my ears, and the screams still come. They're coming from me.

"Stop! Just make it stop!" I yell over the voices. A whinny and a deep guttural laughter that floods over the wails, is my answer.

"We've only just started." It feels like a plunge, from a tower or dropping from an airplane without a parachute. Ice surges through my veins and I can see my breath before my face. A creak of old hinges and the slow clop of a horse. I can feel something pass right through me as the door before me is empty. As it passes, I can feel a tail drag itself across my throat and along the side of my face. Whatever this is, it's playing a dangerous game.

The open door looms ahead, the nightlight is no longer on as nothing seems to make any noise. I pick my way through the room, lighting the dark with my phone casting long shadows. I can see the blue comforter cast over the bed. There is a quiet, unmoving lump in the middle of the bed. I grab a corner of the sheet and begin to pull it back. A smell tickles my nose, but I ignore it. The sheet moves a few inches more and I'm assailed by the stench of a rotting corpse. I panic, vomiting at the end of the bed, and looking back, the sheet has reset itself. No. Not my son, anything but that. Please, God, not him. I yank the sheet from the

bed, a cloud of flies swarm into my face.

I'm swatting and batting at the air, the buzzing, swarming, I can feel them all over my skin. Crawling, buzzing, digging, nipping, I try to breathe and they force their way down my throat. The insects are crawling in my mouth and I'm choking. My knees crash into the floor as I clutch at my useless neck. I can feel everything going black. Whatever was in my house has won. This is it for me.

"Daddy? Are you okay?" The voice comes from behind me. The flies are gone and I pull in all the air my lungs can manage. I turn my head to see my son rubbing his eyes in the doorway, squinting as I shine the light towards him. I extend an arm and he walks into my embrace. He feels real, smells real, and sounds real. I give him a squeeze, something solid, this night can only fade with time. These illusions are unsettling to me, I can't figure out where they came from, bad coffee, or was it grading papers for so long, maybe.

"Yeah Bud, just checking on you." I pat him on the back and lift him up as I stand. "I don't like how dark it is." He half-speaks, half-yawns into my shoulder. "Me either, bud. C'mon, lets go check on your mother." "Hey, Daddy, when did Mommy get a horsy?" I stop in the doorway, my phone still shining, the battery is dying pretty fast. He saw it, the horse, I'm not the only one. I swallow and a shiver goes along my spine.

"There is no horse Bud, you're just tired." I can't even believe my own lie. I peek my head through the doorway, angling the light down the hall into my room. I can see the alarm clock on the nightstand, still blinking twelve. A breeze travels down from the room and onto my face. It has a slick iron-coated smell. I know what that smells like, I've had a few severe cuts in my day, that's the smell of blood. Not my wife, please God no, not again with this.

"Stay right here, okay Buddy? Daddy's gonna go check on Mommy. If I yell I want you to run for the front door and wait outside." I swallow, nothing about this seems right at all to me. I put my son halfway down the hallway, near the stairs. I began to pick my way softly towards my bedroom. I can hear a ragged whisper coming from the room as I drew nearer. "Old McDonald had a farm," the words are followed by a burbling laugh, "and on that farm he had a horse." The laughter is booming now, I turn my head back towards my son who has his hands slammed over his ears, his face pale. I feel his fear.

"Fuck you!" I yell into my doorway. A snarl echoes back at me and I take another two steps towards my door.

"That's a good boy, come closer. I can smell your fear." The voice comes from behind me and I jump, falling into my room just to feel something wet run along the back of my neck. I push myself up and slap a hand to my neck, there is nothing there, just a lingering giggle. In the bed my wife lies still. My heart sinks into my stomach, my hand reaching out. Despair floods my veins. It is slow at first, my hand brushing her shoulder and she gives a slight twitch. I can feel the relief in the sigh and laugh I let out. When I pull her back to face me I lose my stomach.

It's gone, her face is gone. A wet hole of blood and viscera drips in front of me as my senses are assailed with the smell of decayed flesh, her body begins to flake and peel away, the stench growing as her arms bleed away into pools of yellow-red mush. I heave, hard, the bile and whatever I had for dinner hours ago make their way onto my sheets to add to the stench of my wife's corpse. I spew as I step back from the bed and turn to see the horse in the far corner. Its face twists into a gross parody of a smile, the long face crumpling in a waving motion as it lets out a giggle, it stands on its hind legs and begins a slow, loping gate. Four steps and I can see the baleful, yellow eyes and rotting flesh

dangling from the emaciated horse shape it had.

"No," I whisper, "no, no, no, no, no, no." I tense, my body is no longer my own. I can't move. This thing is getting closer, my son is in the hallway. Move, I will my body. *Move and get your damn son out of this house.* The horse has stopped to run a hand— wait, a hand? It folds out of the hoof and digs into the pool of fluid on my bed. All of that, just to run its black tongue through that pool of filth in its hands.

"Boo." The thing chuckles and slams the back of its hand into my face. At least I am moving, the ground rushing up to meet me. I lift my head, I can see my son standing by the stairs, his face pale.

"Run." I choke on the words at first. "Run!" I scream out the words this time and watch my son disappear down the steps. Behind me, whinnying sounds as the creature begins that awkward lope out the door past me. It ducks its head to go out and I grab the lower corner and fling the door with as much force as I can muster. I hear the wood crack against the wet flesh and bone, a thud and a wail of anger from the horse. The door has bounced back into my hands and I fling it again. This time the door is caught and my body is thrown down through the hallway.

"You can't get rid of me." The horse lifts me up into its crumpled, filthy face, the puffs of breath with each snort make me gag.

"Go… To… Hell," I wheeze out between gasps of sour air. For a brief moment the horse face flashes into a malicious grin of some dark origin.

"Where do you think I came from?" Then I'm falling, crashing into the wooden rails and tumbling down to the floor below. I smash down onto my left side, a wet snap and pain erupts through my body. I can't tell if it's my leg or arm that just broke. That thing begins to walk down

the steps on all four of its hooves. All around me are wooden shards of the railing from my second floor. Sobs echo from outside the open front door. I'm trying to call out to my son as I roll over and begin to pull myself through the shards about me. The horse lets out a snort as it reaches the bottom of the steps. One-armed and breathless, I'm clawing towards that thing in my house.

"Get… Out… Of my house." I'm flailing for one of the larger wooden splinters I'm crawling through. That thing laughs, and turns towards me. That slow clop, clop, clop as I'm fighting to lift my head to meet its putrid maw that's contorted. A black tongue rolls out and runs along my face with the same careful grace as a finger.

A hiss emits from the horse, it takes me a moment to realize the thing is trying to tell me to stop talking. It rears back on its hind legs and I wrap my fingers tight around a shard of wood. I'm not sure where I'm going to hit this thing. I wonder if crucifixes would be a help, too bad I have none. I let out a grunt and throw the last bit of my strength behind my stab. The thick tendon on the horse's leg is my target. I can feel the wood shudder and break flesh, then it begins a slow but steady sink into the meat. Black ichor and pus run along my hand. "Oh, you're so naïve." The horse bends closer and a hand unfolds from the hooves to grab me. Its pot belly is covered with open sores and its face crumples into that sick smile. I can feel breath hot as a furnace coating my face. This thing from my nightmares has me by the throat.

"You're… Not… Real." I manage to choke out through a constricted throat. "I'm real," The thing begins, "I'm as real as anything else in your life. I'm that which you so lightly cast aside, I am what will be eternal. This will play on forever and ever in you. Every single time you close your eyes I'll be there waiting for you, because I am that pure, undiluted evil that everyone seems to forget about." It begins to laugh hard, squeezing harder until I start to see black in the corners of my sight.

"Why. . . Me?" Everything is getting cold and all I can see now is that grotesque face. "Because you're so imaginative." There is a snap, a crunch that vibrates through my neck and chest. I can't see, I can't feel. The world about me is black and my breath refuses to come back to me. Am I dead?

I jolt awake, gasping, tearing the blanket that seems to have just wrapped around my head. Sweat coats my body as I gasp for air. I scramble out of the bed and flick on the hall light. Nothing. I glance about, the railing is fine by the stairs, and all the doors are closed. I pick my way down the hall to my son's door and open it just enough to stick my head in. I can see his little form on the bed, bathed in the glow of a nightlight. I open the door all the way to go and sit at the foot of his bed. A sigh escapes my lips and he rolls under the covers. The door clicks shut as I leave. The only noise in my house is my breathing.

Back in my room the clock reads four thirty-one early on a Tuesday morning. No point in going back to sleep, just to get up in forty minutes or so. I make my way downstairs and flick on the coffee maker. That dream is fresh in my mind like it was real. I stand by the machine for a good ten minutes listening to the hiss and bubble, trying to drown out my thoughts. I turn and the cup falls from my hands, crashing to the floor. I fall to my knees with no words or sounds escaping my lips.

Hanging from the ceiling with ropes around their necks are my faceless wife and disemboweled son. Thick chunks of red and black dripping from each of their garish wounds. Behind them, scrawled in that yellow-green pus, is a simple phrase.

Sweet Dreams.

Seclusion of the Reaper

Keith Fleming

Woe is the misery of me
Roaming alone eternally
Shepherd to the souls set free
Met only in brevity

No companion shall I know
To no ending shall I go
I am damned in grief to sow
Reaping those whom life let go

My presence is met with scorn
In gloom's shroud I do adorn
Meeting only those forlorn
Unseen but to those that mourn

I remain alone, unloved
Till in my grasp a soul shoved
The fleeting meet indeed loved
Founded of my touch ungloved

Meeting me is wrought of plight
My course guides your fall or flight
To the fire or the light
Matters little in my sight

I crave repose from the lone
For it you will rot to bone
Hunting friends from youth and crone
Grim it is to be alone

Hope

Tiffany Burke

Hope is a dangerous thing
A destructive tease
Your hopes and dreams
Dangle just out of reach
A flicker of a flame— light and beauty and warmth
So quick to extinguish
So the ice cold can envelop the shattered remnants
Of what used to be your heart
And your dreams
And your joy
Vanish
And leave you empty
—Yet you still have hope
That vain whisper
Beckoning your mind
Reining in your thoughts
Tugging on your heartstrings
Gently and forcefully
Sporadically—
That liar.
The hint of a chance
That you might get what you want
And again it slips away
Leaving you with nothing
But hope

Jacek

Gene Ferrier

"Mi yichyeh, u'mi yomus. . . u mi bacherev, u'mi bash?"

"Who shall live and who shall perish, who by the sword
and who by fire, oh, Lord?"

ONE. An Idyllic Childhood

I hate being a Jew. I'd rather be a Catholic or a Protestant, pray to Mother Mary and say the rosary. Instead we light candles on Hanukkah and Shabbat (the Sabbath), fast on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (The High Holy Days), and say SheHakol before eating or drinking.

My father, Tadeusz Leiber, is an Orthodox Jew, which means he follows the traditions of our forefathers. He is tall with dark brown hair and eyes, grows a payot and wears a kippah. He is a Greek Jew from Sardinia. He is also the Director of Medicine at the Medical University of Lodz. My mother, Hana Leiber, is a Danish Christian with blonde hair and blue eyes. They could not be more different, yet still make a striking couple. They met in Copenhagen during one of my father's medical conventions. It was love at first sight as my mother says. She was the first in her class at the University and is also a doctor, but does not practice. Her first love is her children. My sister, Ilona Leiber, takes after my father. She is nineteen, has long dark brown hair and the grace and reserve of someone much older. She is quiet and serious and spends most of her time studying as she also wants to be a doctor. My brother, Jacek Leiber, is the only member of our family that looks like my mother. He is tall with blond hair, blue eyes and a rebellious streak.

He is defiant and is the only member of our family to constantly stay in trouble. My father calls him a 'hell raiser' and he has been suspended from school more than once, a great disgrace to our family as we are well known in the community. And my name is Marek. I am the youngest son and also take after my father. I have dark brown hair, large brown eyes, and am so nearsighted I wear large thick glasses that the kids often make fun of. I am eight years old. I have a Monarch butterfly collection.

We live in a large villa on the Vistula River ten miles from town. It's a gated house with many flowers and fruit trees. At night you can hear the water of the river gurgling beneath my window. It is also at night my special visitor arrives. I have named him Frankie. Frankie peeks into my bedroom window and scratches on the pane for me to let him in. My mother detests cat hair so we can't keep him inside; however, late at night I feed him milk and crackers. After he is full, I put him under the covers where he sleeps until morning when I let him out again.

It is an idyllic childhood and I know I am lucky as many do not have it as good as this. It is 1938 in Lodz, Poland, and our country is in the midst of great turmoil.

TWO. The Beginning of the End

Adolph Hitler recently became Chancellor of Germany after the death of President Paul von Hindenburg. From that time, he has passed four hundred laws restricting Jews across the country from public life and service. We have no idea why and my mother and father are always tense. Father says Hitler is a dangerous man, but my mother believes he is simply a madman and that the Polish people will never allow him to harm us. Yet on November ninth, everything changes. Riots break out in Lodz and Warsaw. Hundreds of Jews are slaughtered on

the street, synagogues and churches are burned to the ground, and Jewish businesses are destroyed. One month later, Jews are forbidden access to parks, restaurants, and the cinema. We can no longer vote and our Polish citizenship is revoked. Then the Nuremburg laws are introduced, banning marriage between Jews and non-Jews. It is a terrifying time.

One afternoon, my sister comes home in tears. She explains that while at the University of Rzeszów, the Nazi secret police raided the school and told all Jews they were no longer allowed at the University. My sister is devastated. A month later my father arrives home to inform us he has lost his job at the clinic as all high-ranking Jewish officials are banned from public service. My parents discuss leaving the country. We have a distant relative in America who has agreed to take us children, but my father says we are a family and will stay together no matter what. Besides, leaving the country is now prohibited for all Jews. We know it is the beginning of the end for us.

THREE. The Ghetto

Then the unthinkable happens. Just two weeks later, we are sitting down to eat for Yom HaShoah, when suddenly we hear a car drive up and men shouting. A moment later someone is banging on the front door. It is the Gestapo. We are frozen in terror. My father goes to answer the door and they push their way in. A tall German wearing a Nazi uniform tells us we have ten minutes to pack. That our house has been confiscated for the Reich and we are going to be resettled. My sister breaks out in tears; however, we have planned for this moment as it has happened to other Jews in the neighborhood.

My mother jumps up and tells us to pack one suitcase as quickly as possible. I run to my room and grab the small suitcase we use for vacations. Besides socks, shoes and underwear, I pack my Monarch

butterfly collection and my stuffed rabbit, Iggy. The tall German is now yelling. "Jude! Komm herunter! Laus! Schnell!" We all pack things that are important to us. My sister packs her books, my father packs his Torah and tallit, my mother her jewelry, and Jacek his sports trophies, as he is a gifted athlete.

Once back in the living room, the German soldier approaches my mother. He gently lifts her face with his hand. "What beautiful blonde hair you have, Fraulein. Esta Juden?"

"No," she replies coldly. "I'm a Danish Christian."

The Nazi officer sneers. "And you lie down with this Jew scum?" He then spits in her face. She is humiliated, but says nothing. There is nothing we can do.

Once outside we are forced into the street. We are not allowed to walk on the sidewalk. I suddenly burst out crying. "Who will feed Frankie? He will not know what happened!"

My brother scoffs at me. "The hell with that damn cat! Can't you see we have more important things to worry about? We're losing our home after all."

At that moment I hate him as much as the Nazi Storm Trooper. Jacek has always been this way.

We walk the ten miles into town. It takes us over two hours and once at the "resettlement" area, or umschlagplatz, we collapse exhausted. Our suitcases have become lead weights. There are hundreds of other Jews waiting to be resettled. It is summer and everyone is hot and thirsty. Then a truck arrives with the Nazi officer that evicted us from our home. He speaks with a bullhorn

and asks all doctors and lawyers and politicians to step forward. My father, being the law-abiding citizen he is, begins to stand up, but my mother grabs his arm and says, "No, Tadeusz, I think it is a trap!" My father remains seated as others get up and climb into a truck. Luckily my father does not go that day, as later we will learn, all the men and women who obeyed these orders, were taken in the woods and shot.

The rest of us are taken to an enclosed section of the city known as the Lodz Ghetto. There are almost two hundred thousand Jews crammed here in dilapidated houses. The area has been sealed off and armed guards stand at each gate ready to shoot anyone who tries to escape. We are given a rather large apartment on the third floor of a brownstone that is not so bad. However, we find there is no running water and no electricity. It is swelteringly hot. My mother surveys our new "home" and says unconvincingly, "It's not so bad. We can handle this." My father is not so sure as he has asthma and the thick musty smell has already made him start to wheeze.

My mother, father, and sister take the downstairs portion of the house, and my brother and I move into the attic. Luckily, there is a large window we can open for fresh air. Despite the traumatic experience of being evicted from our home, we adjust rather quickly as necessity is the mother of invention. We carry water upstairs from a well out back and light candles at night. Life goes on, at least for now.

FOUR. Survival

After a week in the ghetto, we realize how horrible it actually is. Children are begging on the street. People lie dead in every alley. Some are starving while others walk around wearing diamonds and fancy dresses. It is a microcosm of the real world. We have concerts and plays while people die. Every night we hear gunfire

and people screaming.

My father is a member of the Judenrat, the organization of Jewish men responsible for the running of the ghetto. With that privilege comes more freedom and more food. It is because of his position we are relatively safe. Then on July fourteenth, at three in the morning, we wake to hear someone banging on the front door. We dread that sound because only the Gestapo knocks like that. My mother jumps up to answer. They ask her if Tadeusz Leiber is there. She nods and they come inside and announce my father is under arrest. He is now a prisoner of war.

"But why!" My mother screams. "Please don't take him!" There is no choice. We are devastated without the patriarch of our family. My mother falls into a deep depression and is bedridden. Now it is up to my brother to support us. He is only seventeen.

FIVE. Jacek

Jacek is not as smart as my sister and I, but he is strong and fearless. We have never gotten along as he has always teased me. Now that we share a room it is even worse. He is constantly telling me to "grow up and be a man." I have no idea why he is so resentful of me. Now that Father is gone, it is up to him to find food for the four of us as our rations have dwindled to nothing. I tell him I can beg in the street like the other kids, but he looks disgusted and says no brother of his will ever beg. That the Nazis will never reduce us to that. Instead, we begin to steal.

Late one night, as Jacek lies on the roof to get fresh air, he calls to me. "Marek, come here!" he says excitedly. He points to the pipe. At first, I don't understand.

"Can't you see? The drainpipe runs directly down to Sekorska Street, the Aryan side of the ghetto. We can climb down that pipe and get food. I have blond hair and blue eyes. No one would ever suspect I'm a Jew!"

I am terrified as I'm afraid of heights. On top of that, I can barely see. "I can't do it, Jacek. We're too far up! If we fall, we will die."

Jacek looks at me harshly. "Grow up and be a man, Marek. What choice do we have? Sit here and starve? I won't let them do that to us!"

I shake my head as Jacek climbs out on the ledge of the roof and begins testing the drainpipe with all of his weight.

"Jacek, no!" I say, thinking that any moment I will see him tumble to his death. But before I can count to ten, Jacek is standing far below in the shadows of Sekorska Street.

"Come on, Marek! Don't be afraid. If we both go, we can bring back more food. Besides, if you fall, I will catch you."

I want to please my brother. I want to be just like him, but I know I am a coward. Despite that fact, I ease out onto the drainpipe holding on for dear life. Then slowly I inch my way down, scraping my hands and knuckles against the brick wall of the house. Suddenly, I am frozen in fear. I can't move up or down and I begin to cry.

"I can't see, Jacek. Help me!"

For once, my brother does not get angry and tells me I can do it. To not be afraid. Slowly, I release my grip and begin the long descent once again. I am relieved to feel his strong hands grab me and feel my feet on solid ground.

"I'm proud of you, Marek." This is the first time he has ever complimented me and I know he means it. From that point on, we become more than brothers – we become a team. We develop a plan where I divert a shop owner's attention by saying I am lost and can't find my mother, while Jacek loads up a sack of food to take back to the ghetto. He is swift and sly and for once we have enough to eat. My mother never asks how Jacek has found food, and we don't tell her as we know she would be terrified for our safety. She is still sick, but Ilona is now taking care of her. We think she has typhus, but there is medicine in the ghetto to help her.

As the weeks go by, Jacek and I have learned to scale down the side of the building in a matter of seconds. It's wonderful to be free from the death and disease of the ghetto. For a short time, I remember what it feels like to be a normal citizen. Able to live one's life in peace.

SIX. Pogrom

On April ninth, 1939, a year to the date of our arrival, we wake to the sounds of shouting and screaming. Large armored trucks pull into the ghetto as the Gestapo rounds up everyone on the street. We watch from the upstairs window as women and children are forced into trucks and driven away. A mother with an infant resists one of the Nazis telling him she has to get home to her other children. The Nazi shoots them both and leaves them for dead. Rumors have been going around that the ghetto is being liquidated and those remaining are being transferred to Auschwitz. We all know this is a death camp. We can do nothing but sit and wait. Jacek and I continue our ruse of stealing food, but because security has been increased, we cannot go as often. Late at night, we lie in bed and wonder how we will save Momma and Ilona. Jacek says he knows a man that can make false passports and papers declaring one a Polish Christian, but those papers cost upwards of ten thousand zlotys. That is a fortune and there is no way

we can get papers for all four of us. Besides, how would mother scale down the wall in her condition, and we know that Ilona would never leave her.

Sometimes I cry because I don't know why this is happening to us. Why they hate and kill us and cage us up like animals. Just for being Jews? I never chose to be a Jew. I wonder if there is any justice in the world. Jacek hates to see me cry because he thinks it's a weakness.

"Crying never saved anyone, Marek," he says coldly. "Grow up and be a man."

He is always angry now. He fumes, he storms around the house calling them Nazi bastards and murderers. He can't stand being helpless. He wants to fight and kill and join the Jewish resistance, but mother will not hear of it. So we sit and wait for the day it is our turn to be taken to the death camps.

SEVEN. The Gift

I turned nine years old behind the ghetto walls. Jacek is eighteen, Ilona is twenty, and Momma is forty-three. We have been imprisoned for a year and two months. However, on my birthday, my family throws me a surprise party. Momma is feeling better and has baked a cake, Ilona has knitted me a scarf, and Jacek has given me a watch. It must have cost him a fortune. I am so happy as I blow out the candles and make a wish. I wish for my family's safety and freedom. I wish that we can somehow find a way to escape the horror that has become our life. Yet despite all the festivities and good wishes for my birthday, everyone is sad. Mother will not stop hugging me, Ilona will not stop crying, and Jacek will not look at me.

"What's wrong with everyone?" I ask, wondering why they are all so

sad. No one says anything, but I know something is going on. Later that night, as Jacek and I are ready to make one of our journeys to the Aryan side, he is unusually quiet and distant. I ask him what is wrong but he will not answer me. Once on Sekorska Street, it is quiet as a curfew has been enacted and almost everyone is home.

I look up at Jacek and he has an odd expression on his face. He is not acting like his usual gregarious self.

"What's wrong, Jacek?" I ask him again.

Jacek reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out some papers. "Happy birthday, little brother."

"What is this?" I ask, unfolding them. Inside I see a passport and a birth certificate with the name "Hershel Budzinski" with my date of birth declaring me a Polish Christian.

"I don't understand," I say, confused.

"Momma sold the rest of her jewelry. There was only enough for one set of identification papers. We want you to go to America. To find Uncle Aron and tell him we are fine. Here is a thousand zlotys. This will pay for your boat ride to America."

"But I can't go! I can't leave you and Momma and Ilona! Why did you do this for me?"

"Because you are the youngest and have the brightest future. I must stay here and take care of Momma and Ilona. It's the only way, Marek. This is what we've planned."

Suddenly I understood what Jacek is saying. They wanted me to leave

them all behind! I burst into tears.

"I won't go! I can't go! I've never been to America!" I cry.
"Please, Marek, do it for the rest of us. It's what Poppa would have wanted."

Suddenly Jacek pulls me to him. I can feel the metal buttons of his shirt press against the side of my face. When I look up at him, he is crying.

"Now go! Get out of here and don't look back. You must do this, Marek. You must grow up and be a man."

I turn away from him, the tears blinding my way. I trip and fall on the cobblestone street, but feel nothing. When I turn back a moment later, Jacek is gone.

I cry even harder. "Goodbye Ilona, goodbye Momma, goodbye Poppa, goodbye Jacek. I know I will never see you again."

EIGHT. America

I made it to America and started a new life with my Uncle Aron. I became a doctor in honor of my sister, got married and had children of my own, but I could never forget my family. I found out later from the Jewish League that my beautiful sister Ilona died on the Thousand Mile March following the liquidation of Auschwitz. Momma died shortly after arriving at Auschwitz in the gas chambers and my brother Jacek died in Treblinka of starvation. I still have no idea why they did what they did for me, but I am forever grateful. And as I look at my own children and grandchildren, I have one remaining question. I wonder if Jacek would think I'm a man now.

Wars

Katie Rayburn

I shout at the top of my lungs,
That the war is over.
Der Krieg Ist Vorbei!
But no one listens.
I'm an American, shouting for a German man.
You cannot feel my pain.
There are centuries between us,
Experiences you will never know.
And you will never know this man.
But you understand pain.
You understand losing someone.
So shout with me, that the war is won.
Or lost, from his side.
Because it doesn't matter who won
Or who is who.
Anger subsides
And fighting is done.
Make up now
Or the war will have destroyed us all.
Who cares who was right
And who was wrong?
I'd rather have you with all your flaws

Than nothing at all.
Love is blind when it is true
And you better know that beyond
Reason, doubt, what people say,
And what they don't say,
That in the very end,
Not even death do us part,
I will always love you.
I will never say goodbye,
Never let it be final.
Der Krieg Ist Vorbei.

My Own Personal Hell

Rachel Lavergne

Sometimes being alone is okay
And sometimes
It just is too much that it hurts.
Once again alone staring off into the distance
Searching for something to make me feel better
To make everything feel okay again.
No one seems to care as I cry alone in my bed
Filled with emotions I understand little of
Questioning why I feel the way I do.
Why I hurt as much as I do.
Why no one seems to care.
I could drift off into nothingness and no one would notice
Or even be concerned by me not being there. Fear, pain, and the
Absence of everything and the presence of nothing
Consume me and fill my entire being.
Darkness pulls at my consciousness.
How much longer can this last? How much longer can I last?
Madness forms at the seams.
Hard to believe I'm me, when I don't feel like me
That crazy that longs to be,
Tears at the fibers of my reality.

Caveman Files

Kevin Shorter

I remember it like it was yesterday, that long embrace that turned a whisper into a goodbye. Those were the good times, times when time couldn't tell you anything or dictate every facet of life. It runs out, but never runs. When I was with you we were pawns in a chess game that traded places. I was a king protecting his queen because it wasn't about winning the game just your heart! I cuddled with your insecurities, I lived between your ears and not your legs, I valued your brain and not your head, I got lost in who you are and not who you were! You were fire in a world of Cavemen, hot chocolate during the Ice Age, and gravity in space, held me down, then let me down. Moments with you made time become frozen yet seconds made years feel too short. You made every beat of my heart misstep for fear of making a mistake. Then you gave him what should have been mine and made heart-felt pleas of baby please, you pleaded for some time, but as you know time waits for no one, and neither will I. I'll tell you to settle down but not settle. See when I left, I left such an imprint on your heart that the person you'd entertain next would have to know me just to know you. I'm written in your genetic code, part of your DNA.

The Aesthetic of Deception

Ariel Landry

Her ashen face,
He caressed.
Eyes closed.
Raw desire overcame her.
With reflection,
She drew away.
Hands swallowed her.
A whispered cry
Chirped from beneath his grip.
Tears began to flow.
A reassuring smile
Painted across his lips.
Darkness.
Her body,
Limp.

Don't Change

Elizabeth King

I don't want to change you
I just want a moment where
Our eyes meet in the middle of a floor
With chandeliers and crystal doors
Instruments playing
A reflection of ourselves
Smiling on crystal glasses
The palms of our hands line themselves
Pressed with sweat
Nervous
Yet hearts calming themselves
Close to your face I inhale the breath of you
And how your shirt smells of Dove soap
You've grown
I feel your fuzz on my cheek
A man
Pulling me close
Time froze like a broken clock
Refusing time any longer
I don't want to change you

Steal your humorous identity
But let's not make romance the enemy
I just want a moment
Where your heart can skip a beat at the sight of me
Anticipating my shadow
My sounds vibrating tender on your ears
Like an echo to the clouds
So pleased by God you have to thank him out loud
I just want to be enough
Is that asking for much?
Why can't I have a need for your touch?
Is it a crime to love?
I don't want to be a burden
But there is a love at fault and a heart that's hurting
Again, not for change
But yearning
For a moment
With You.

Barstow Texas 1941

Amanda James

Based entirely on true events, and dedicated to the boy that found the orange slice.

Foreword

In 1941, Barstow, Texas, resembled a mangy coyote, gut shot, and abandoned in the desert to writhe alone in her death throes. George E. Barstow had founded the town in the last decade of the 1800's. Mr. Barstow, a world expert on irrigation, had come to Texas via Rhode Island with the express purpose of turning this dry piece of Texas panhandle into the jewel of west Texas. After successfully bringing to fruition a complex and efficient system of water towers and canals, he had managed to cultivate Barstow into an agriculture powerhouse, and in 1904 Mr. Barstow's grapes, grown in Barstow, snagged the silver medal at the World's Fair in St. Louis.

At this time, Barstow held about a thousand people, but later that year, the Pecos River Dam busted. The canal systems began to dry up, drought set in, and the dreams and schemes of the residents of Barstow blew away right along with their crops. By the 1930's, fewer than 400 residents would still call it home, clinging to desolate stretches of land and isolated from society. It was to the town of Barstow that ten-month-old Tonky Davis would be sent to live with his grandparents in the year of 1936. His grandparents, Papere and Mamere Chairs, were Cajun refugees who had left Eastern Louisiana during the period of time when being Cajun meant to be lower than dirt itself. Tonky would survive both the Great Depression and his childhood in the desolate Dust Bowl country, scratching out a childhood in the fading ghost town of Barstow, Texas.

Barstow, Texas. 1941.

An indifferent orb of early morning sun gazed down upon a sagging hen shack through a choking veil of west Texas dust. Several slats had been ripped off and carried away in the relentless wind, allowing the sun to filter in between them in dancing rays of dust-colored light. Tonky Davis crouched unseen behind the back wall of that hen shack, patiently calculating the most opportune time to strike. He supposed he might ought to feel guilty, stealing eggs like this. Mamere always made sure he got an egg a day, but when you're six years old and growing out of your britches, one egg for breakfast doesn't always cut it. Concealed in the shade, he cocked his head and listened for cues on the wind. Mamere was humming some foreign-sounding bouncy tune from the kitchen as she cleaned up from breakfast. He swayed to and fro a moment, letting her melody sweep over him. Her voice was old and scratchy, the wind carrying it thinned it out, but it was nice, for what it was. Next there came a shuffle of feet across the porch of the stucco house he shared with his grandparents, followed by a creak from the rocking chair as Papere set down to pack his pipe. Good. It's now or never. Quick as lightning, he snaked a dirty hand through the slats of the hen shack, fishing a brown egg out from under a scrawny hen. Cupping it in his palms, he made one hole about the size of a dime with a mesquite stick he'd been toting in his pocket, then brought the egg to his lips and sucked. Ignoring the earthy smell of hen scat, he relished the warm, rich, raw egg as it slid down his throat, easing the dull grumblings in his belly. He tilted the egg high over his head as he sucked, in an effort to get every last drop of nourishment down his gullet. When it was empty he placed the barren but intact shell on the ground underneath the hen's nesting box, hoping when Mamere came out later to collect she'd think a polecat or an egg-sucking neighbor dog had been the culprit. The hens softly cackled their disapproval and looked him over through mean and beady eyes. He ran a hand over the feathered back of his unwilling benefactor before sprinting off towards

the water tower in the middle of town, careful to run at such an angle as would keep him out of eyesight of Papere on the porch.

He leapt like a jackrabbit along the path he had worn between Papere's place and the main road. He dodged around outbuildings and well sheds, pumping his arms up and down and slamming his feet down in the Texas dirt, causing little puffs of dust to rise with every footfall. He came upon a dry canal crossing and slowed to a walk in order to more carefully pick his way through red ant hills and cactus. He eyed the feathery spines of the cacti distrustfully. He'd been too quick last time he'd crossed the canal and he'd picked up an ankle full of the stinging needles; it had taken nearly two full days to pluck them all out. Safely across, he fixed his eyes again on the top of the water tower and started to guess whether or not Elmo was going to get free today to play. Just a year or so older than Tonky, Elmo was the nearest thing to a friend he had out here in the dust. Elmo had a mammy that frowned upon the scraps he and Tonky would sometimes get in with the Mexican boys, and if Elmo showed up at home cut up, she almost always kept him in a few days afterward, much to the dismay of Tonky, who was left to his own devices in the meantime. As he ducked down the alley between Dr. Black's office and the grocery store, he figured he'd have a fifty-fifty shot of seeing Elmo today. Yesterday they'd both scuffled with Vito's gang, and had proudly come away with three black eyes, two cuts, and several bruises between them. Nothing unusual. Especially since Vito and his friends were all at least four years older than the both of them. When Tonky had gotten home, Mamere had handed him a rag dipped in witch hazel and had gone back to minding her business. Tonky figured Elmo's mammy might not have been so understanding though, being that Elmo had come away with two of the black eyes and most of the bruises.

The shadow of the water tower loomed overhead as he rounded the corner by Deet Turner's house. Scanning the tower's cracked support

beams underneath confirmed Tonky's assumption that he was going to have to go it alone today. No Elmo. No sign that Elmo had even come by at all since they last met up yesterday morning. He kicked around the base for awhile, swinging on the beams like the trapeze lady he'd seen last year when the circus had come to Pecos. After ten minutes or so his hands were getting blistered. He abandoned his game and his hopes of seeing Elmo, and, pointing himself in the direction of the ten-mile dam on the Pecos, trudged off down the main road out of town. The Pecos Dam was a faulty, leaky mass of metal and concrete that lay just a mile outside of Barstow to the east. Tonky spent many long hours playing at its base where leaks made tiny streams. Some days he'd pretend it was a great mountain chain and he a fearless explorer. He'd heroically scale its crumbling face and peer down over the edge, where carp sometimes gathered in great numbers searching for a way downriver. Peering down into that river at those trapped carp never failed to awake in him a feeling of freedom. Of strength. Standing astride that dam, he was brave, fearless, and free. The dam couldn't stop him. He was not a carp, by any means.

Tonky was about a tenth a mile from the Pecos and deeply involved in an intricate game of kicking rocks when he spotted something out of place in the bar ditch. He approached cautiously on dirty toes and paused in wonderment above a huge red anthill. Among the tiny white pebbles and multitude of fat, shiny ants there set an abandoned candied orange slice. The gummied slice had been licked clean of sugar and tossed to the side of the road by some fortunate passerby, at which point Tonky concluded the industrious ants must've taken it upon themselves to drag it back to their hole as tribute for their queen. Tonky had never before had a piece of candy, not in his whole life. Impulsively, he reached down and plucked the slice from the ants, wet his fingers and wiped the dirt and ant soldiers from it, marveling at the windfall as he turned it over in the palm of his hand. Tentatively, he took a bite, careful not to eat too much at once, determined to make it last. Sweet

and tangy, the orange gummy slice was the best thing he'd ate in a year, far better than fresh eggs even. Finishing it off in the next bite, he took to licking the remaining stickiness from his fingers in pure satisfaction. An old man on a shade porch about twenty yards up the road played witness to the whole scene, and called Tonky over as he passed by, still sucking on his fingers.

"Yessur?" Tonky wondered if he'd done something to get in trouble. Most folks knew his Papere, being as he was the preacher over at the Church of Christ. He hoped whatever it was wasn't going to get back to his grandfolks.

"I picked apples this morning. I got too many here, boy. Thought you might take a sack with you for me. You mind taking some of these apples with you? I ain't got room for them all."

Tonky assented with a nod of his head, hopped over the low picket fence he'd been leaning on, and proceeded on up the porch, where he retrieved the apple sack the old man pointed out. Back on the other side of the fence, he opened the sack to examine the apples. All ripe! He'd expected them to be either rotten or green. Nobody in their right mind gave away good apples for free! He glanced back up to the porch, perplexed.

"You sure, mister?"

"You go on boy, and don't tell your grandma who gave you them apples."

Never one to ponder the oddities of the adult world for too long, Tonky gave a wave, slung the sack over his shoulder, and once again got underway. The rest of his trek to the dam proved uneventful, and twenty minutes later Tonky found himself at the dam's base, lapping water from a crack in the concrete.

Refreshed, Tonky glanced around and made note of the time. The hazy sun hung directly overhead, beating down on his shoulders. Nigh on midday. Picking out a big flat piece of rock partially shaded by a mesquite, he fished out an apple and set down to lunch. Sweet cool apple juice sopped down both sides of his face as he ate, leaving tiny rivers of stickiness through the smudged dust on his cheeks and clear down to his bare chest. He finished the first apple and chunked the core near 30 feet with a mighty swing of his scrawny shoulders. He watched it plunk against the wall of the dam and bounce away toward a cedar before he set back down on his slab, intent on enjoying another. Just a few bites in his ears pricked up and he paused, mouth full, scanning the direction he had thrown the core. Paluuuf. There it was again. His gaze came to rest on a short drab bush about fifty yards off. As he studied it, it took a step forward and turned sideways. Distinct long ears and a dark stripe down its shoulder jolted Tonky from his frozen watch. A wild donk! How'd you like that? Tonky knew there were wild burros farther down the Pecos River, but he never before seen one. Heck, he'd never even heard of one this close to Barstow. The donkey sniffed the dirt again, resulting in the sounds Tonky had been hearing earlier. It found his apple core and took to munching like it was half starved. In fact, Tonky concluded the donk to be just that. Even from thirty yards out Tonky could count the critter's ribs. A bloated belly showed he'd been eating mesquite bark for want of grass, and his rafters were so bony you could've struck a match on them. The burro came closer and closer to Tonky, scenting the air, apparently unable to resist the powerful pull of the apple sack at Tonky's feet. Ten yards out the creature stopped and looked Tonky over. Tonky impulsively threw the apple he'd been munching on out to the burro, and to Tonky's delight he plucked it up and went to chewing without hesitation.

The novelty of the situation sent Tonky's boyish mind spinning

off on imagined adventures. If he could get the donk to Papere's place, he could maybe train him to ride. Oh! He could just imagine himself riding his little donkey over to the water tower to meet Elmo. Vito's gang had never seen a donk either, he reckoned. Imagine how mad they'd get for him to have a riding donkey of his very own, and them ain't never even seen one. He thought how important he'd look, up on that donk. He figured donk riding would be a right fine distraction on days Elmo's mammy kept him in. With all these thoughts tumbling around inside him, he opened his sack and counted his apples. Nine. That'd be enough to get the thing home, he hoped.

The donk walked right up to him now, blinking at him and the sack in expectation. Tonky obliged the donk's silent pleading and passed him another apple. The donk took this one right off his fingertips, like they'd known each other their whole lives. Tonky pulled out another apple and stood up, walked ten yards, and waited for the donk to finish the one he was working on. The donk did not disappoint. Soon as he was done chewing he took off after Tonky, ears pricked forward and eyes focused on Tonky's apple sack. Tonky kept moving and the donk kept up behind him. Every hundred yards or so, Tonky let him catch up and take the apple from his hand. The going was a little slow, and the sun was awful hot, but Tonky was a man of vision at the moment, and he was determined to get that donk home.

Sweat dripped off the both of them and ran down in rivulets by the time they made town. Tonky's face was a smear of grime and sticky apple juice, sweat stung the corners of his eyes, but he dared not wipe them, knowing the sand covering his hands would burn more than the sweat. By this time, most of the residents of Barstow were shut up inside their homes, napping through the afternoon heat. A few rocked slowly on their porches. When Tonky passed by with his donk in tow, they set

straight up at attention, gawking something fierce. Tonky's chest swelled with pride, though he pretended not to notice the attention. He could imagine the conversation around the dinner tables later. A porch sitter would say, "Did you see Tonky's donkey?"

A napper would answer, "Why no!" and be mighty sorry they'd missed it.

They left the main road and began to weave in and out of the buildings towards the canal crossing. Another two hundred yards and they'd be there. Tonky ran out of apples, but the donk seemed content to throw his lot in with Tonky, and continued to follow faithfully. Across the canal. Pass the cactus patch. He could see Papere on the porch now. He wanted to holler out to him, but he restrained, mindful not to spook his charge. Finally, the pair reached the bottom of the porch steps.

"Papere! Wake up! Look, Papere! I found him by the dam. I tamed him; he followed me all the way here!"

Papere roused himself from his nap on the porch. Taking in the scene before him, Papere's eyes lit up. Genuine pride seeped into his withered face as he chuckled his approval.

He rose slowly, so as to not spook the donk. "Down by the Pecos you say, Tonky?" He eased towards the door and began to rifle through a rusty bucket of tools. He stood up, his sinewy fingers grasped around a ball peen hammer.

"Yessur. Down by the dam, I was eating apples and I reckon he was…. Papere!" Tonky was midsentence when Papere descended the steps, reached Tonky and the donk, raised the ball peen high and knocked Tonky's donk right between the eyes, dropping him where he stood. Tiny shockwaves shot up Tonky's arms, exploding as light behind his eyes, riveting him to the ground as if his legs were fence posts. His

fantasies of adventures he and his donk might share faded into oblivion with the sure strike of Papere's hammer. Unable to react, Tonky stood silently on, gazing down at his friend, the donk, lying prostrate in the dirt. Papere bounded back up the steps and disappeared inside the house, returning in a few minutes with his skinning knife. Tonky remained rooted beside the donk, watching his legs twitch as a queasiness took hold in Tonky's belly. Mamere came out following Papere with the big bowl they used for cleaning carp.

"He led it all the way here?" Mamere asked of Papere, incredulously.

"All by hisself, all the way from the dam." Papere tousled Tonky's hair in affirmation. He knelt over the donk, slitting his throat in one decisive movement. "Helluva good job, Tonky. Helluva good job."

That night, Mamere set a plate down in front of Tonky. He stared stolidly down at three thinly fried strips of donk, and contemplated his options. Papere said grace, and on either side of him forks began to clank against ceramic.

His belly growled. His vision blurred.

He pushed back against the tight ball building in his chest, bravely picked up his fork, and left his boyhood behind him.

Think of Me

Nicholas Jones

When you're riding in your car,
And you look up,
And you see the stars,
Think of me,

When you're feeling free,
And you look in the passenger seat,
And there's nobody,
Think of me,

When you turn around,
And you come back to town,
And you're lost but can't be found,
Think of me,

When you walk in the park,
And it's after dark,
And it's getting hard,
Think of me,

When you raise the flag,
And set the sail,
And you hit the shore,
Think of me,

When you hear Dreams,

And it all seems,
Like you can't be seen,
Think of me,

When your legs are cold,
And you have no one to hold,
And it gets old,
Think of me,

When you feel unloved,
Know you aren't,
And even though I'm far,
Think of me,

When you're cold at night,
And you can't find light,
I'll be in the dark too,
Please think of me,

I'll be thinking of you,
And I'll be out of view,
And I'll be hoping that you,
Are thinking of me too.

I will always love you.

Mama

Rachel Lavergne

Mama
This life you breathed into me
Making me a possibility
I am eternally grateful for everything you have done
Or will ever do
You are my hero
My shield through the pain
My knight in shining armor
My greatest love in this world after God
His most precious gift to me was the creation of you
I know how you look at yourself sometimes
But all I see is the love you have given me
Life without you would be meaningless
Although I know sometime I will have to face this world without you
Being able to know such a beautiful, perfectly imperfect woman
Such as yourself has been my greatest gift so far,
And looking down I know you have made your daddy
So proud.

In Your Eyes

Nicholas Jones

Life is full of complications,
Things are hard,
And it's often harder to shine through,

Having a friend like you,
Makes everything,
So much easier to do,

The world can be cruel,
Full of hypocrites and unjust rule,
But I have you,

In your eyes,
I can see myself,
And what I've always needed,

A friend with open arms,
Who holds me when I cry,
And endures,

A woman that inspires,
Doesn't let a chance go by,
And always promises to try.

Impact the World

Ashton Ebarb

One set of footprints
nothing more
One set of parents
beyond the door

Now, where do I go?
What do I do?
How do I impact the world?

One single heart
happy, confused
One great confusion
which do I choose?

And where do I go?
What do I do?
How do I impact the world?

One great dream
yet unrealized
One great prayer
for guidance

To know where to go
To know what to do
To finally impact the world

Universal

Elizabeth King

Universal To the ends and back, birds sing to the wind and the trees dance.
The sun smiling on the face of a child. Hands painted in pomegranates.
Tracing the words of a mother inhaling aspirations and exhaling doubt.
A father's lullaby plant glittered kisses on a forehead or a cheek.
Clouds forming a puppet show while sands warm the feet.
Bid farewell to your lover. See liberty in NYC.
Toast to last year's resolution. Cure the hunger of faces planted on televisions.
With hymns. Kneeling in pews. Hold your guns to stop violence.
War shall start peace. Yes peace and quiet screams from the mouths of the deceased.
A young boy grew six feet, shoes sculpted around his six feet.
Kind words from a woman on the street. Rest on corners, heroin veins,
Playgrounds, clowns holding inside frowns.
Where is my America?
Somewhere
Lost.

Transition

Courtney Lazore

Awakening under a charcoal sky
I struggle to open my eyes, to search out the sun.
Gasping for breath, I attempt to move—
but my body refuses to respond.
All limbs are stiff and heavy,
all senses are overactive.
I lie still once more, staring at the unfamiliar sky.
How did I get here? Why do I feel as if I'm on fire?

A thin, pale face appears above mine
as onyx eyes lock with my gaze.
A sinister smile plays on the unusual mouth—
lips that are too red, teeth that are too sharp.
Heightened instincts click, bringing life back to my limbs.
I run away—faster than possible—then stop abruptly,
lightheaded and shocked at my speed.
What's happening to me?

A sharp, searing pain summons a quick reflex
as my hand flies to my throat.
I remove it and stare, horrified, at the ruby red blood
as it covers the flesh that is now too pale.

Swan Song

Matthew Mims

Un-mute my echo and let harmony grant me peace.
Every past memory is embedded in these wings.
A spider's nest for feet so my words could never sing,
A waddle for a balance so I never had dreams.
Mourn me in tranquility, my death is delight.
Envision me as a symbol, if only for the night.
Calm as water just before the rising sun.
Explosive in the darkness, when you see me you run.
There's a song for everything, but this one is mine.
A sense of freedom comes when I lose sight of my eyes.
A quake from my heart to tell me that everything's fine.
A touch from above told me come to the sky.

Ignored.

Siera Suffin

I text you and the message was read at 8:52 p.m.
And yet, I still haven't received a reply.
But the next day you come to me, bearing all of your problems
The only vowel you are concerned about is I!
I'm struggling to make it day to day, and you don't even care to ask why.
I cried myself an ocean and you sat and watched as I drowned in my tears.
We have been friends for years, but you can't tell that I'm hurting.
Did you see those tweets last night?
Or did you suddenly go blind when I walked into class with puffy eyes?
I'm yelling for help, but you can't hear my cry.
There are days where I want to give up, throw the towel in.
All I ever wanted was for you to sit and listen. . .
I'm showing all the signs, but you couldn't take one second out of your day to pay attention.

Worst Sleep

Katie Rayburn

The worst sleep I get
Is when you're in my bed.
My arms outstretched towards you
Or my body curled into you.
Not that I hate you,
Not that I ever want to wake up
Without you,
But
My sleeps are light
And I wake up not wanting to sleep
Because you're right next to me.
I cling to you like life, like water,
Like air and warmth.
I never had such warmth before.
How could I fall asleep?
But even after all that,
I'd rather have you here.
Defy Death,
Come back to me.
God cannot take my nocturnal trouble away.
With you, I sleep disturbed.
Without you, I dream undisturbed,
Because it's the only place
I can see you again.

A Jewel In the Crown

Ashtyn Ehrb

The star-strewn sky illuminated much of the world above but very little below as a mother and daughter cruised along the ebony pavement of a solitary country road. Headlights were the only source of light to make LA Hwy 174 visible to the mother's eyes. Her 14-year old daughter sat beside her, chatter away as she so often did. One of the girl's teachers had once said she was "a bright girl with the gift of gab."

"So I was thinking to try out for the team this year. My arm's pretty good and I have the stamina to run longer than almost every girl in class," the girl was saying.

Her mother, who had been part listening and part focusing on the road, suddenly took on a stern look. "Now don't go bragging. It isn't lady-like. A young lady should be modest."

"But, Momma," the girl protested, "you said a young lady should be honest, right?"

Her mother conceded with a nod.

"Well, I'm just being honest," the girl grinned.

The mother helplessly rolled her eyes. The girl was certain she had briefly glimpsed a grin on her mother's face, though.

About a mile up the road Mrs. Dorothy Chance, affectionately known in the Mitchell community as Mrs. Dot, was forced to pull over on the side of the road because of car troubles. Fortunately, one of her

neighbors was on the highway too. The neighborhood man parked his truck in the middle of the oncoming lane so that one headlight shone upon the front of Mrs. Dot's car and the other shone toward the traffic behind Mrs. Dot's car. Hardly anyone traveled this road at night anyway. He and his daughter got out to see what the trouble was and help if they could, forgetting to turn off the brights. Mrs. Dot was relieved and opened the hood of her car.

Further down the highway, the mother and her daughter continued their conversation. The girl looked forward to relaxing after a week of hitting the school books hard. She was just about to say so when her mom pointed out a light ahead of them.

"What's that up ahead? Is that a car with one headlight or a motorcycle?"

The girl peered closely. It looked like someone driving on the wrong side of the road with a single headlight---a blinding one at that! Maybe a motorcycle?

"I don't know," she answered, shaking her head.

As they neared closer and closer, the mother began to slow down, dimmed her headlights, and moved over about half-way onto the shoulder of the road, still transfixed on the light, wondering what was going on, drawn as a fly to flame just before it's burned.

Mrs. Dot was examining the car when her neighbor heard another car coming down the highway behind Mrs. Dot's. He saw the headlights of the car loom closer until with alarm he realized the car was still approaching.

"They're not going to stop!" the man shouted. He pushed Mrs. Dot

sideways and jumped to the other side. His daughter who had been standing on the side of the rode cringed. The last thing Mrs. Dot remembered was being unbalanced as she fell…and then pain.

The girl had turned to her mother when she felt her mom slam on the breaks and the car skid along the wet highway. Her mother had just seen Mrs. Dot's car…too late. The girl cried, hurled by the force of the collision, and pain seared her knee and shoulder where she collided with the dash. Her mother's mouth was bleeding from hitting the steering wheel so hard. Mrs. Dot was pinned at the legs between her own car and their neighbor's truck. The neighbor's daughter reversed their truck so that her dad could lay Mrs. Dot on the ground. Then the neighbor's daughter drove to a friend's house to call an ambulance.

The girl later reflected that tragedies just aren't supposed to happen to you. They are the things you hear about on the news or else watch on a movie. They even happen in books. They are never meant to happen to you. Right?

But it did, a part of her admitted. It has. The chilling realization robbed her lungs of air. Why did she and her mother have to be on that highway at the same moment Mrs. Dot was stopped? Why hadn't anyone had some sort of warning like emergency lights? Maybe it was her fault for not telling her mom, who wore glasses, to stop completely.

Truthfully though, it didn't matter to blame anyone…not even herself. What happened, happened. All that was left to do was the toughest part of all: move on.

A town lady who used to smile now walked past with shifting eyes, like she expected to be attacked. Instead of feeling hurt like she did when one lady ignored her completely, the girl began to lose her cool.

It was an accident! she wanted to shout. Some people seemed to believe her mother intentionally hurt Mrs. Dot. She saw judgment reflected in their eyes just as she saw sympathy in the eyes of those who took the accident for what it was.

"Whatever," she breathed out, trying to convince herself she wasn't bothered by the recent change in some of the community.

"Hey!" A familiar voice called. "You have to come over and listen to my new tape. Come on!" The girl's best childhood friend started running home. Hearing the warm and reassuring voice just then, the girl smiled and ran to catch up, taking everything with her but her cares.

And the girl grew older with each passing season. She continued running and even started on her softball team.

Mrs. Dot grew older too. After the accident, the former RN had both legs amputated near her knees, never to walk again. For about 18 months she was away from home, working with physical therapists to adapt to doing everyday activities without her legs. She persisted faithfully in learning to do for herself and avoiding self-pity. Mrs. Dot had faith that her God would help her and give her strength to help herself. With the aid of hand controls for her car, she gained strength enough to drive herself. When eventually she was able to go home, neighbors asked if she was afraid to drive. She replied, "The Lord has brought me this far and I figure he will see me through."

As the girl was running a couple of days after Mrs. Dot came back home, she passed Mrs. Dot's house. Mrs. Dot had groceries to bring inside. The girl stopped to help Mrs. Dot bring them in. It was one of the first times the two had an opportunity to speak since the accident. The girl needed to talk. There were nights she still woke from nightmarish memories of the accident. Mrs. Dot needed to talk too.

Because as strong and faithful as Mrs. Dot was, as kind and generous, as optimistic and loving, she needed a shoulder to cry on at times to drive away tears and carry on. After much tears and forgiveness that day, a sense of peace rested upon the two, a warmth of grace.

And the girl went back. Mrs. Dot was widowed and her adopted children had long grown and gone so she appreciated the company. The girl equally enjoyed the company and returned several more times. The two became good friends. A town lady told the girl when she was grown, "You have earned several jewels in your crown above by helping Mrs. Dot." Although this was meant kindly, the girl thought the remark odd. She didn't visit and help Mrs. Dot to "earn jewels." She did it because she sincerely loved Mrs. Dot, just as many in the community loved the kind lady. Mrs. Dot refrained from gossip, living by the rule that if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. She constantly helped others, seemed to have an infinite vein of generosity.

When the girl began working at her first job and later attended trade school, she moved from her home to Mrs. Dot's. The girl's parents appreciated having a close friend for their daughter to stay with. Mrs. Dot guided the girl much like a surrogate mother. She said she had "a need to be needed and help." The girl earned her keep by helping Mrs. Dot in return: sometimes just by talking and listening. On occasion when Mrs. Dot sighed and cried, the girl was there. She listened lovingly. And Mrs. Dot lovingly stood by the girl…until the day the grown girl married.

Years passed and the grown girl had children of her own. Grandparents were overjoyed, and so was Mrs. Dot. Cars, games, and snacks were never in short supply whenever Mrs. Dot was involved. She and the grown girl still enjoyed talking and sharing stories. Mrs. Dot was a part of each family celebration, trial, joy, and fellowship…until she passed away peacefully in her sleep, less than two weeks after she

turned 84. During the eulogy, the grown girl and her daughter listened as the Reverend said Mrs. Dot "loved the Lord" and loved to help. "She would give you the shirt off her back if she thought you needed it more than her." She selflessly put others ahead of herself and was quick to forgive: boy, did she live.

Mrs. Dot and the girl were just like two pink roses that made it through the harsh constraints of a bitter winter only to flourish with delight in the spring. To inspire those who saw what had come from a bitter winter, a painful tragedy. To inspire those who saw the inner strength it took for a rose like Mrs. Dot to treat her tragedy like a purpose to teach others no matter how bad things get we are not alone. We can keep going, keep growing.

And what of the girl? Well, she told her children the story of how she and Mrs. Dot became life-long friends. In the comfort of their home or on a breezy outdoor day, her children listened. She even agreed to let her daughter immortalize the story in paper and ink, so that here at last I can share with you a secret. My mom was told that she had "earned jewels" for her crown by helping Mrs. Dot. But in truth, the real jewel was knowing Mrs. Dorothy Chance.

Body

Nicholas Jones

A body is a beautiful thing,
A masterpiece,
And a pleasure to the eyes,
Where do I begin?

Touch yourself,
And what is it you feel?

Sweet skin,
Worn like a blanket,
Covering you in modesty,

A body is like a brook,
It bends and it curves,
Like a road,
It's long and it swerves,

A body is like a jacket,
It's worn and it ages with time,

It has scars, bruises, blemishes, stretch marks,
But it is yours,
And it is beautiful,
Simply because,
It is yours.

Dear Heart,

Siera Sutton

I thought I did what was best for you, for us.
I thought it was love, but it turned out to be lust.
I'm sorry for breaking you.
I'm sorry for lying to you when I knew those feelings weren't true.
I'm sorry for not letting your wounds completely heal,
I'm sorry for those sleepless nights and those emotions you had to feel.
I'm sorry for putting you through hell.
The next time I promise not to lie to you about how I feel.
The next time I hand you over, I promise the love will be real
And if I fall again, I promise you will have a shield.
I promise to not let you turn bitter or cold.
I'm sorry that I'm a sucker for love.
And I know it is hard to trust me again,
…but I promise you, the next time will be different.

The Conversation

Renae Sirles

"You don't know the way I feel,
this emotional pain you cannot heal.
This pain it does not go away,
no matter what it is you say.

I am lost and can't be found,
Quiet now! Don't make a sound!
There is no time for negotiating,
when I'm in the midst of contemplating.

Internal thoughts of suicide,
should I live or should I die?
You see, it's not death that I fear,
it's living life without you here.

I don't need your reprimanding,
therapy talks of deciphered understanding!
I don't need your fucking pills to make me happy,
can't you see. . . I MISS YOU, DADDY!"

"Daughter, listen close to what I say,
I have left, but you must stay.

Live your life and make me proud,
dying now is not allowed."

"But life is hard,
I can't decide!
Should I live,
or should I die?

My only joys, they come in handfuls,
yet the burdens, they arrive in bagfuls!
How do I face those challenges before me,
death could be the only answer for me."

"Face your challenges, don't run and hide,
know in spirit, I'll be by your side.
Trust in yourself and what you're capable of achieving,
follow your dreams and never stop believing.

Life is not an easy ride,
but, know that I will be by your side.
In every decision that you make,
Please, your life you must not take!

I will always be watching over you,
I'm your father, it's what I do!
Just call on me and I'll answer you back,
offer my advice, and that's a fact!

Listen close to what I say,
I have gone, but you must stay.
Your life it is not complete,
until your challenges you do defeat.

I sense you're feeling better now, is it true?
Are you no longer feeling down; feeling blue?
You will see me again one day,
this is all I have to say."

"Thank you, Dad, for all you've said,
I'm tired now and must go to bed.
But, before I fall asleep,
your words of wisdom I will reap.

I will fight to overcome my sorrow,
learn to look forward to tomorrow.

My life I do love and will not take,
this promise to you I will not break.

I will take on life's challenges to make you proud,
I know dying now is not allowed.
There is so much left in life for me to do!
Thank you, Dad.
I love you.

Being

Eric Fairchild

As you race to become that which you were,
Wise thoughts do not always concur.
Though you cannot become what which you were,
You were anyway, to be sure.

The light hits each highest, farthest flower.
There is no petal it will not empower.
For no thing has there ever been an hour
Of helplessness, left all alone to cower.

We kneel beside the pond of yesterday.
Its rippling waves will bring us cares today.
Though pangs of dispraised love seem here to stay,
We know that there is yet a better way.

That past becomes the future is a lie.
Until we see this, our hands remain tied.
And we shall stay as slaves until we die;
Believing all that we could do was try.

Mankind has grown up angry, scared, alone.
Into the lasting All, together roam.

In sighs and eyes and tender, yearning moan,
A feeling sends us reeling for a home.

The world is kissable with lips to kiss.
The world is missable with hearts to miss.
And though each day we all remain remiss,
The will of the Collective sums to this.

Love is like an island on the sea;
Floating, formed like pollen for the bee;
Anchored free in all eternity,
Giving us a chance to fully be.

Lasting Moments

Ashton Ebarb

Across the fields of green
the wind blows gently past,
between the weathered house
and emerald blades of grass.
Floating ever so slightly
sounding out so quietly,
yet somehow mightily strong
like the power of a whispering song.

And hear, the wind breaks the silence
all around, there's not another sound
but oh, remember how it used to be
when there was a family
to fill the air with tuneful days,
laughter, squeals, and children's play?
Since they've gone it's not the same…
And the steady wind blows past,
a mourning sigh that this won't last.

Leaves of emerald fade
across untrodden grass,
a sea of brown outlayed

unmoving, unbombast.
Yet the wind creeps in to
sweep them clear,
away to a brighter day
like the power of a faithful prayer.

Hear how the wind breaks the silence
all around, there's not another sound
only far off echoes of how it used to be
when there was a family
who filled the air with tuneful days,
laughter and tears that people make.
With them gone, it's not the same
And the steady wind blows past,
a heavy sigh that it can't last.

As the steady wind blows past,
I'm thankful while each moment lasts.

Harvest

Elizabeth King

Seasonal Trilogies sow seeds in the hearts of the grounds people,
Who plant their hands in the soil. And they pray for their dirt to be purified in holy waters.
Growth has been stunted, women won't bear fruit, and men only devour their game when howling at the moon.
The summer that warmed the hearts has gone too soon.
Now the leaves are leaving requesting their rights to righteousness and freedom from the trees.
Place themselves beautifully on grasses green.
Branches stick together.
Protesting against lumberjacks and their future coffee tables.
Souls blackened but consider themselves the cream of the crop.
Whistling sad songs from the boiling pots,
The wind blows a chaos of falling rainbows to the mouths of rakes, who grind their teeth in self-hate.
What happens when the night comes too soon?
Reflects the earth with a harvest moon, trees grieve for their leaves
When town folks forget what gathering really means
Crops become a poor man's dream
And growth seems to be the farthest thing seen.
You witness a shortage of faith
And a people with a face of autumn doomed to fall.

Other

Madison Croom

Other.
According to society that's where I belong.
Because I don't fit into any other category,
Because I refuse to pick just one side of me.

Other.
Not White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American or Islander.
Not enough of one thing to fit into one race.
Because I am a little bit more than most, I am not enough.

Other.
Not multiethnic, multiracial, or multicultural.
Not just one.

Other.
That's the box I check because it sounds less pretentious than
"I prefer not to respond."

Other.
Because in school we are taught about the integrity of this country we call home;
Where bits of history are left out of the textbooks,
And people act like racism no longer exists,

While the KKK have their own homepage.

Other.
Because even if the WASPs aren't technically the majority,
They still call the shots.

Other.
Because in this cultural melting pot that we call America,
The motto is still speak English or go back to where you came from.

Other.
Because my existence cannot be defined by only one ethnic background.

Other.
Because I don't fit in.
Because I was made to stand out.

Other.
Because that's all I am to them.
Because I choose to accept all parts of me.

I am OTHER.

De La Soul (Amerikkka)

Matthew Mims

Mama I'm sensitive,
And I often question my business on why you & daddy put me here, but I'm gonna make the best of it.
My soul told me that 19 should be the new 50. And taking shots at my generation is risky but we have to hear this.
At this moment in time the only thing we have in common is the darkness.
Hollow as drum beats, slaying every part of me as if my mistakes were on repeat,
When I'm only trying to preach these life lessons to birth blessings, but they defeat me.
What keeps me up at night isn't easy, so I sleep when the sun shows it's face.
Out of sight,
Out of mind,
Out of body and often out of place.
I need your faith & it's so hard to reach on bending knees.
I'm blessed, but I'm hexed,
I'm stressed, nonetheless.
I should've been named Dr. Matthew Luther X,
My days are numbered and stretched to the point where there is none of me left.
Then my fears are pumping in my blood like dubstep.
So. . .
What are you afraid of?
The breakup text?
The makeup sex?

Another exam? Quiz? Test?
Fantasies of my father coming back when these crosses on my chest tell me that he never left.
The beat don't stop on the djembe when my roots come out.
Calvary is on the other side of the mound.
I'm an X-File waiting to be discovered,
Purple describes my mother & unlike any other I'm human.
We are walking pieces of candy picking cotton off each other's souls for personal growth when we bleed the same color.
If Skittles, Watermelon Arizona, 40 dollars & 15 cents could buy me a ticket to heaven I wouldn't need a court to decide my fate.
I'd snack on that shit the whole way with a hoodie over my face because. . .
All I see is the darkness,
All I feel is nothing near.
I saw sunshine in the form of a cross,
I found God in a casket that was not even mine.
Before you catch me in a field I'd rather panhandle nickels & dimes & pay for a third grade education and pave my way to heaven with stepping stones.
Failing is the only thing that makes me succeed.
It's time to get rid of the jealousy, lust, greed, hate, eagerness, envy, doubt, strife, pain, unwanted pleasure,
And birth passion,
The master has come back to preach a new chapter,
I'm saying it forward, but I dreamed it backwards and it goes like this.
At this moment in time the only thing we have in common is the darkness. . . and come to find out. . . that's all we need.

Neighborhood Kids

Meredith Prochaska

No one liked the summer camp kids.

We all hated the way they took over our neighborhood pool like ants swarming forgotten potato chips that have fallen to the ground. As the regulars, we'd wait anxiously for the campers to leave, not caring if it took all afternoon, not caring if it took all day. Most of us lived just around the corner; we had plenty of time. The pool might have been our favorite haunt but we wouldn't share it with them if we could help it.

Summers were our favorite time. Our parents set us loose upon the neighborhood, giving us free range as long as we never passed the welcome sign at the end of Evangeline Street. That's where the neighborhood met the highway, a dangerous place for kids on bikes. On our especially adventurous days, we'd dare each other to run across the highway. We always waited until the road was empty before we'd accept the challenge. We weren't as bold as we liked to pretend.

None of us wanted to be on the 6 o'clock news as the kid who got hit by a car for being stupid.

But then once, when we were fifteen, Georgia got brave. It was a Tuesday, a camp kid day at the pool. We thought we were too cool to even grace the pool's presence if the camp kids had been there. We'd rather spend our days in our second favorite spot: behind the neighborhood sign.

It was one of those elaborate signs, constructed of rustic bricks, maybe five feet high, and it read Welcome to Washington Crossing in pretty cursive, as though Washington Crossing was the kind of

place anyone actually wanted to be. My brother Tommy always liked to joke that the sign cost more than every house on our block put together. Behind the sign was a huge oak tree that shielded us from the hot July sun and offered us an organic jungle gym. It was the only place we were completely free from the prying eyes of our disdained authority figures.

"Marnie," Georgia called me out that day. "Dare me to do it."

As was our custom that summer, we all met behind the sign around 11 AM. Our parents had granted us the relished pleasure of sleeping in past 10 upon our going to high school, but they still wanted us out of the house before noon. We'd meet up there and spend our days lounging about in our bathing suits; Georgia and I'd wear our bikini tops and colorful shorts while the boys simply sported their swim trunks. My father thought I ought to cover up more, but I didn't care. I was fifteen; there was little he could tell me that I'd listen to.

"Georgie, don't be stupid," Tommy told her. He was up in the tree, casually reading a Salinger book. That was all he did that summer. Read Salinger and called all of us phonies. He thought he was superior since he'd be seventeen by September. But in my mind, he had about as much authority as my father and that wasn't saying much.

Georgia stood at the edge of the road, staring all of us down. She reached her dark arms up to the sky and let her head fall back, glorying in the sun. That was the summer she started dreading her hair. She looked invincible. "Tommy, don't be such a bummer all the time. Somebody dare me to do it."

Trevor and Nick, who'd been napping against the base of the tree,

looked up at her.

"Okay," Trevor said, the hint of a grin making its way lazily across his face. "Do it."

Nick and I glanced at each other. Neither of us wanted to be a spoil sport, but at the same time, we didn't exactly want our best friend smushed on the side of the highway. It was a busy traffic day. The stakes were a lot higher than they usually were.

"Nick, Marnie, what do you think? Should I?"

There was no hint of nervousness in her voice, only exhilaration. This was the sort of game Georgia liked to play with us. Nick and I were the more cautious ones of our group. Not that we didn't have our moments of recklessness, quite often honestly, but we usually held back before we acted on impulse. Not like Georgia. Georgia liked to feel like her life was exciting. She liked to feel on edge.

"Sure, go for it, if you really want to." Nick shrugged. He was always so noncommittal. In five minutes when things went wrong, he'd be the first to retract his statement. To say that he didn't really approve, he just knew she wouldn't listen to reason. Of course, that didn't stop me from thinking he was the cutest boy that summer, or the summer after or the one after that, with his drowsy brown eyes and raspy voice. But we'd grown up together; I'd seen this whole thing play out a dozen times.

I knew I needed to do better than saying "sure."

"Not only do I dare you," I announced while Georgia grinned, "I'll run with you."

Georgia squealed and threw her arms around me. “Of course, you will! It’ll be fun, you’ll see.”

Tommy rolled his eyes and hopped down from his perch in the tree. “Y’all are idiots. If Mom asks, I told you not to.”

“Mom’s not gonna ask because she won’t ever even know. We’ll be fine, Tom.”

Despite Tommy’s laborious “efforts” to stop us, he stood alongside Nick and Trevor in front of the sign in expectation. We watched the cars speed by. The speed limit was 50 miles per hour but no one drove that speed around this particular curve. We’d all watched our own parents drive 65, even 70, down this stretch without blinking. These cars wouldn’t slow down for us. The drivers didn’t pay enough attention.

Georgia and I held hands as we watched the road, each of us surveying for the perfect moment. Nick was holding his breath behind us, Trevor was egging us on, Tommy was huffing about us being dumb.

There was a sudden break in the cars. Georgia and I both saw it and knew we’d have enough to time to dart across. From behind us, Trevor yelled, “On your mark, get set…”

And we were off, screaming and laughing our way across the lanes. We made it to the other side with little incident, feeling the tinge of asphalt on the bottom of our bare feet.

The cars continued past us, still in a blur, as we waved at our friends across the highway. Trevor and Nick high-fived and sent us thumbs-ups while Tommy continued to stand arms crossed. He did laugh

though at our absolute exhilaration and wild hugging on the side of the road.

Once our excitement had worn off, we realized we'd have to make it back across. Our adventure was only half over but we'd already made it once; the next time would be easy. Again, Georgia and I stood shoulder-to-shoulder, gripping each other's hands tightly. We were ready for this.

There was another break in the cars, but it would be a close call. I wasn't ready. Without sensing my apprehension, Georgia took my hand and pulled me into the street without any warning.

"Georgia, wait!" I called to her but she didn't seem to notice. She had no regard for her own survival in that moment. My heart was pounding and all I could picture were our faces on the news, those two dumb girls we swore we'd never be, our mothers crying in my living room.

Georgia made it across with stealth, her track star legs propelling her forward with grace and ease. In my fear, I tripped, leaving me at the mercy of the silver grille of a black Ford truck. I was alone in the middle of the right lane, a hurt ankle and no way to move.

This was it, I thought. There was no way I'd make it across in time. In that one moment, the sun seemed to stop shining and I saw my friends across the road, stunned faces, horrified eyes. My brother's mouth opened in a yell of my name, but I was too shocked to hear him. Georgia looked back at me, regret and guilt in her black eyes, her entire body shaking. I'd never believed the whole "life flashing before your eyes" cliché but God, here it was. Fifteen years old and so much potential, all gone.

But then there was a screech, a nails-on-a-chalkboard sound of immense volume, as the truck veered off to the shoulder, just in time. The driver, a guy in his early twenties, got out of the cab of the car, cursing under his breath. He wore a fraternity t-shirt and dark frame glasses, probably a student at our local university. Tommy had run over to me and helped me to my feet, acting as a crutch as I limped back across the road.

"What the hell are you kids thinking?" the driver asked us, obviously shaken up from almost hitting me. "Jesus Christ, do you know I could've killed you? For fuck's sake, thank God I saw you!"

I was stunned into silence, but Georgia began to sob, shoulders shaking, hands over her face. In our eleven years of friendship, I could not recall ever seeing her cry. Not even when her hamster died or when she broke her leg in the 5th grade. Georgia Blair Rhodes simply didn't cry.

But here she was, a weeping mess, and none of us knew what to do with her. Trevor and Nick stared at her in shock while Tommy was too busy making sure I didn't fall apart. Mr. College Guy's face softened as he watched our little group's astonishment at what all had occurred. I had no words for any of it; I wasn't surprised to find him just as speechless.

Then, just like that, Georgia's wailing subsided. She became her bouncy self once more, seeming to forget the past ten minutes altogether. She strode right up to the driver. "Sorry for all of this. We were just playing a harmless game and I overestimated mine and Marnie's abilities. We really didn't mean to bug you out like this."

He shrugged with a slight nervous laugh. "I probably overreacted. I just got really scared I was going to kill one of y'all. But I guess we

all made it out alive so there's not too much of a problem."

"Yeah, no, it's totally my fault. But I'm okay, Marnie's okay, you're okay. It's really not a big deal," she said, motioning with her hands as she talked. She seemed completely unfazed. "I'm Georgia, by the way." She extended her hand towards him for a handshake which seemed to take his edge off a bit.

"Scott," he replied, shaking her hand. "Y'all be more careful. I know we all do dumb shit, but that was so close to being a tragedy." We all nodded in agreement, each of us pretty certain we wouldn't be running across the highway anytime soon. Scott got back into his truck and drove away, leaving us to deal with one another.

"Georgia, what the hell, you almost killed my sister," Tommy said. He still had his arm around me.

"It was dumb, I know it was. It won't happen again," Georgia rolled her eyes.

"Tommy, it's better if you just drop it," I told him. "We're all good. I won't do anything like that again, I promise."

He just muttered under his breath, leaving his place by my side for his spot in the tree.

Trevor high-fived me. "Marnie, I thought you were a goner for a second. But you made it, kid, you made it." I couldn't help but give him a small laugh for that.

Nick still looked considerably shaken up as he gave me a half-hearted hug. "Please don't do anything dumb like that again. Neither of you should've done that." I could've guessed his response

would have been something like that.

After another hour of lounging around the sign, we saw the sun began to set and we all headed home, all of us agreeing that we didn't need to mention this whole debacle to our parents. Before we left, Georgia pulled me close to her and whispered to me, "Meet me at the pool at midnight. We need to talk."

Tommy and I walked home together, both of us exhausted from the weird afternoon. I walked barefoot on the grass, the pavement too hot to endure. Tommy looked straight ahead, lost in thought, his copy of Salinger an afterthought in his right hand. After a few minutes of silence, he spoke. "Marnie, you know Georgia's been one of our closest friends since we moved here."

"Yeah?" I said, unsure of what he was going to say next. I couldn't remember not being friends with Georgia, the two of us always being little wild things in the neighborhood.

"I just… She's always been there, but she seems different lately. I don't know. I don't think…" he stopped short in his talking. I could tell there was more that he didn't know how to tell me. "I don't think she's a good person to spend so much time with anymore. She's just reckless and she doesn't give a shit about any of us really. I think we've all outgrown her."

"What?" I was completely blown away. Georgia was always there for us. Always. She was like the sister my parents had failed to bless me with. How could I not hang out with her? "Tommy, you're being ridiculous. I know today was probably not our brightest idea but stop being her friend? I think that's a little harsh. She was just having fun."

Tommy took a deep breath. "But Marnie, having fun for her is becoming life or death situations. She's not okay with just sitting around, like she used to be."
"Maybe not. Maybe it's just you. You're probably just too old for us," I said, hoping he could hear the daggers in my voice.

"Well, you're just lying to yourself if you think she's a worthy friend anymore. She instigates problems. She wants you to fail while she succeeds, if that wasn't obvious from today." He was being so smug, I almost slapped him. "I heard about the cigarettes she stole the other day so you guys could smoke them."

"How the hell--?" It must've been Nick. I wouldn't put it past him to rat. "So what? That was one thing. I was curious. I won't do it again."

"She stole them, Marnie. From Nick's parents' store. You can't be okay with that."

Honestly, it didn't sit well with me from the beginning, but I wasn't going to tell him that. "It's really none of your business."

"She's always getting into trouble and dragging you with her. You're better than that, is all I'm saying."

We had reached our house by then and I had never been so glad to see our royal blue front door. I was ready for this conversation to be over. For Tommy to suggest any of it was absurd. Georgia was my best friend in the entire world. Who did he honestly think he was to tell me any of that?

That night, I waited until my parents and Tommy had gone to sleep before I went to meet Georgia at the pool. Sneaking out was easy; I'd been doing it since I was maybe six or seven. All I had to do was

hoist open my window and climb through. It was a short drop to the ground, even easier now that I'd actually had a growth spurt. My lanky five-foot-five self made it out with no complications.
It was a short, easy walk to the pool. Georgia and I had started going out there at night when we were about twelve. It was one of the few times that we were able to hang out, only us, without the boys looming over us. It had become a sort of summer ritual, our midnight swims and late night talks. When I got there, I had to shimmy through the one hole in the chain-link fence. It was around the back, a spot that no one had ever deemed necessary to fix. It worked out in our favor, at least. My mother told me that they finally did fix it the summer I turned twenty, but by then, we all lived in different towns; we had no use for it anymore.

But this night, it was exactly what I needed for my illegal entry into the neighborhood pool. It was so quiet; the roar of the camp kids only an imagined echo from earlier in the day. It was a quarter moon that night and the reflection shone off the blue of the chlorine water. Georgia sat at the end closest to me, watching something across the pool, her feet dangling in the water around the twelve-foot mark.

She didn't look at me, but I could see her tight-lipped smile. "Marnie, I'm glad you could made it. I really need to talk to you."

"Is this about earlier? Because that's totally over and done with now. You know I don't care," I told her, sitting down next to her. The water was still warm from the heat of the July day.

She shook her head. "No, it's something else. You remember how I told you about Leo asking me to go out with him a couple weeks ago?"

I nodded, remembering vaguely. Since we turned fourteen, Georgia had not been short on boys' attention. It wasn't so much that she was beautiful, but that she was striking and outgoing; she could start up a conversation with anyone and boys flocked to her like moths. She was never without a boyfriend of some sort. I could've been jealous but I wasn't, not really. It usually only caused more heartache for her in the end, and anyway, at least up until that summer, boys were simply friends to me. I was hardly interested in a romantic relationship. I was too busy worrying about making good grades and harnessing my drawing abilities and holding onto my childhood. I didn't care about the status of having all the boys love me.

But Georgia did care. She wanted as much attention as she could get but she only returned the favor to the boys she felt were worthy. Leo Cappello was one such boy.

"Well, I went out with him. We had a really great time, we went to eat at his parents' restaurant, and Marnie, he is so cute. Smart, too, in that kinda shrewd way. He lets everyone know it too. I liked him a lot." As Georgia talked, I could see her getting upset, her gesturing hands shaking with anxiety. I didn't know where her story was going.

"So I brought him back here to the neighborhood. We hung out behind the welcome sign and he snuck some wine from his parents and we drank under the tree, hiding out where no one could see us. It really shoulda been perfect, you know? He was like some sort of movie star, looking at me the way he did, telling me I was beautiful, calling me honey. I couldn't help myself.

"But Marnie, we started kissing and he said it would be fine! He said I would be fine. He said it was worth it, that 'wasn't this the perfect moment,' he'd done this kinda thing before, he knew what he was

doing, Marnie."

Georgia's agitation increased, her hands spinning wildly together in her lap. She wouldn't look me in the eyes. It made me nervous too. I was so naïve about the world that summer. I didn't know what any of this meant.

"He just kept kissing me and then it just happened and it wasn't what I wanted. But I couldn't tell him no, Marnie, because it was Leo and he was so goddamned charming. But what if I had wanted something different, you know? What if it wasn't fine?" Georgia was hysterical by then, crying. I grabbed her hands because I didn't know what else to do. "He ruined that spot, Marnie, the sign was your place and mine and the boys and it's all wrong now. I told myself it was romantic but I wasn't ready. I thought I was, but I wasn't. I wish it hadn't have happened. I wanted so much more than that, a white dress on my wedding day, a— a boy who loved me, not just some senior basketball player who thinks my name is Georgia Rose because he never bothered to notice anything different."

Listening to my best friend, my heart was breaking. I didn't know what to say. I had no idea what to do with that kind of hurt, that kind of disappointment. I found myself shaking worse than earlier that day when I almost died. This was a different kind of catastrophe. Georgia would never be on the 6 PM news for this, but maybe it was worse than if she had been. She'd been holding onto this for weeks now, letting this secret torment her, driving her to recklessness.

"It's okay, Georgie," I whispered, having no other words for her. I couldn't fix this.

"No, it's not. I could've killed you, Marn, and it would have just been because I can't handle myself. I let some boy take advantage

of me and I almost hurt my best friend because I was being dumb. I just don't know what to do with myself."

Of course, I still didn't know what to say. I had never seen Georgia look so small before. As she talked, she seemed to shrink: her grief crippling her until she was so tiny, she was almost unrecognizable. Tears blurred her eyes and all I think of was Alice in Wonderland—that if Georgia cried anymore, our whole world would fill with her sadness and we would both drown.

I squeezed her hands and let her cry everything out. When she was done, she wiped her eyes and stared at me for the first time all night. "Marnie, we're both going to be okay, you know that?"

I wasn't so sure at this point, honestly, but I nodded my head anyway. The best I could do in that moment was agree with her. She laughed softly, "God, Marnie, why'd you let me make such a fool of myself? Thanks for listening to me, I guess. Let's go home."

And just like that, she was done. She stood up from the pool's edge, water glistening on her dark legs, and then she pulled me up. We made our way back through the fence to our neighborhood awaiting us.

She never brought up any of what she had told me ever again. Every once in a while, Nick or Trevor would mention that day that "Marnie almost died," but it became just another one of those dumb things that we had done together, not a direct result of Georgia's grief over the things that had happened to her. Tommy raised eyebrows when Georgia would join us, making his opinion of her clear, but I stood by her as best as I could. The boys could never understand but I didn't hold that against them.

We were the neighborhood kids. We had to stick together.

Change

Madison Croom

It is in the nature of all things,
To change as time goes on.
Time passes,
Flowers wilt,
Seasons come and go…
Feelings do too.
But maybe… just maybe,
The thing that changed the most was you.

Still Doll

Rachel Lavergne

Arrogance against innocence
Purity destroyed by hatred and lust.
Death by fire, bright and burning
Scars left on the inside, unseen and silent.
No stories left on her lips, tired of mortals' lying kiss.
Pain etched on her lovely face, sweet brilliance broken with disbelief.
Lifeless as a doll. Played with like a violin, shattering each
Part of her skin as she falls and breaks with each bow and bend
Time taking her beautiful form, shaping it into something darker
Only the demon inside could love her.
Masked in what looks like happiness, hiding the true depths of her Reality.
Crazed madness marring her inner being
Lies stitching back the broken strings
Playing each piece with a melody
Crying out for someone to see.
To hear all the hurt that's whispered into the night.
Silence straining against her guise
Making it harder for anyone to realize
How badly she hurts inside
Buried beneath all the lies captured within her own demise.
Waiting for the one to stand against the crowd,
The one to howl when she is gone.
The one who knows her melody as his own
The one who will make that final risk to change her failing art
Into a lasting masterpiece.

America

Elizabeth King

The world is a strange place where streets are bedrooms with stone mattresses
Streetlights reflect urine from human beings' toilets lay on lawns with the scent
Of vomit trailing from the lips of a drunkard US bleeds red blue tears that flow into
White waters disappearing in the memory of those who cried
Mothers are born they birth bastards to fathers who won't buy Pampers
Grandmothers quitting their day jobs to start daycares
For a young woman aspired to get welfare thought she made it to the top so she stayed there
Public school systems trade schools for prisons bail money for tuition
A 9 to 5 for fool's gold and Jordans that's living, no darling, that's limit
Reevaluate life you'll see that's gimmick
Expand your minds instead of wasting time that's ticking
Sad how truth falls upon deaf ears
Why won't you listen?
To the sirens playing like jazz musicians
But its bodies dropping over the beat bass-filled voices
Stop it! Your screams are noiseless almost as empty as your heart is.
So Again I ask, where is my America?
Somewhere
Lost.

Fall

Meredith Prochaska

in the dark of summer,
we drove like mad
and fell into the sky,
swimming through constellations,
diving deep for stars.
each time,
we came back up
empty-handed.

now, we watch the river
while it rains,
waves like tv static,
gray and unfathomable.
our clothes are soaked through.
in my head, you kiss me.
in your head, i don't cry.

we chase airport lights
like fireflies
and hope to keep them.
but they flicker, die,
we lose interest,

move on.
in the chill of november,
we play tag
across the highway
to keep ourselves warm,
screaming our invincibility.

you disappear,
i panic,
we fall apart.
your face appears across the road,
on the other sides of cars.
we were never together
at all.

1 Train

Matthew Mims

My vision dismembers encrypted images of your facial features, but I
am keen to voice recognition.
Half past 3 is when the moon has shifted and your echo appears when
my nose gets bloody and ears start glistening.
When all seems lost, my father calls me when the train blows.
The slow approach shows that it snores crystal smoke and treads course
on silent backbone, His soul speaks to me.
Frequently he allows me to see my future in a short span
And thread strands of missing links to kink this jigsaw out of madness.
Stemming from years of abandonment, I cut the eagerness of my
diligence into fractions to riddle my dividend into something happy.
Toy with me.
Whistle scriptures like a teakettle and wake every town of sinners
and beggars.
Send letters in coded messages that can cause mass hysteria honest folk.
The diversion was no joke because I am gone in a second.
And by the time they figure my flesh is nonexistent they will turn
skeptic and restless.
Does that make you selfish?
A locomotive's motion is nostalgic to savor,
Chug drums when you come if we don't rise NOW there will be no LATER.
In full attention, at ease.

At the lowest point of my life he's finally decided to come back and
rescue me.
Tied down by all of my transgressions,
I need a bigger mattress if you want to prolong your fancy.
Me; out of all of your children, you came such a distance to marvel at
my progress.
Expecting me to move mountains when I haven't even made the first
step.
The furnace of your eyes is hot lava and blood boils by the second.
The Pacific is in Union even across the Atlantic.
I cherish our relations, but let us make our meditations on time.
The pace that we create is in sync with the sky.
The hunger from your steam births healthy lives, hammers faster than
Jack down these rigged tracks of iron.
My whole outlook on life has shifted.
I gift wrap my sins and present them on Christmas.
Blow kisses to my queen as we eat berries, bacon, and biscuits.
Prepping myself for the next move that he makes,
A head-on collision cannot be the only way.
Weigh my options carefully before I turn the next page.
When the 1 Train calls I'll have my calendar up to date.
"Why?" Because he shows no favoritism!

He takes schizophrenics, whores, and even Caucasian women.
As soon as I think he's finished the ride has just begun.
I am Omega, your fourth and last son.
The vine of divine fruit, every hundred years the tree bears one.
After stars collide they drench the sky with the pollen called faith.
We are on our way to new chapters, bending backwards in this rapture.
Encaptioned within fragments of time searching for a paddle.
A stern direction to lead me back into my consciousness.
Daddy always said, "Never doubt your own strengths."
The key is his secrets, and sometimes they visit me in February.
When violets are at their peak and amethysts are born of many.
I whisper as loud as I can, "I've given you everything but my soul!"
The train blows, he looks at me vanishing as I wake and says,"I know."

Life Born of Love

Keith R Fleming

The forest of my love is now long dead,
Barren, dismal and dusky
Its green and bloom supplanted with thistle
Thorn and bramble ensnaring
All stirrings to protect its ever-gloom

The gardens of my heart have known neglect
The borne fruit robbed in malice
Its strong stalks trampled to perish and rot
Once smooth stone paths bearing
Center now broken and lost to peril

In the forest of my dry dreary love
There is a spark, a blaze
Birthed bright from green-eyed flames to spread clearing
Pain of old to grant life
Anew the barren land budding ardor

In the unkempt gardens of my heart found
Infested with scorn's vermin
There arises a keeper of honest
Heart with gentle hands plucking
Weeds of sorrow to sow seeds of passion

To my very own Oedipus: You can stay lost at sea for all I care.

Meredith Prochaska

To my very own Oedipus:
You can stay lost at sea for all I care.

you were gone the morning of May 6
before i'd even flinched at the morning sun
flooding over our bed.

you said you needed to find yourself,
you'd lost your own self since you met me.

my mother saw you
out front the local grocery,
two weeks later,
your arm around a girl
whose blonde hair and dainty hands
could never be mine.
i know they say
forgive and forget.
and honey,
you got the forgetting
down pat.

but i don't know how to forgive your absence,
your early morning departure,
your arm around a girl
who isn't me.

somehow,
you got lost among the lotus-eaters
when you went to find yourself,
undoing the memory of me
with each bite you took of her pretty mouth.

now tell me—
was i really that easy to forget?

love,
i might have said always but
i cannot be your Penelope.
my tapestry's finished
and i am done
waiting for you.

The Case For Identity Moratorium or Some Mess

Jessica Withers

The Case for Identity Moratorium or Some Mess
You Are Born—
You're your daddy's little football star.
You're your mom's tiny dancer.
Your neck doesn't even hold your head yet, but you have a future.
You Get Older—
The world is your oyster.
Cowboy, Astronaut, Rock Star, Lion Tamer,
Movie Star, Professional Athlete, Race Car Driver,
The FREAKING AMERICAN PRESIDENT!
With a little positive thinking, the sky's the limit.
You Get Older—
You'll be a senator. Or a surgeon. Or a music producer.
You know, something realistic.
Job market? What's a job market?
You Get Older—
You accept less. Employment is the only goal.
Health insurance. Weekends off. Yearly paid vacation.
All the grass is the same damn green.
Why did I think I would be somebody?
Why did I want to save the world?
I blame Captain Planet.

Pact

Rachel Lavergne

Pact Embrace them equally for one cannot exist
Without the other,
My Light has bad thoughts and feelings
My Dark is kind and filled with love,
Life
Balanced with Good and Evil
Light and Dark
Yin and Yang
Knows no suppression
Is bound by no limitations
For I feed my Wolves equally
Because
THEY are a part of Me.

My Mental Disorder

Aimee Calmes

I'm sitting here writing this at 3:37 in the morning, because Matthias is keeping me awake. He has been doing that a lot lately. Since August, he has kept close, and as comforting as that sounds, it has been a nightmare. Before I get into that, though, let me introduce you to Matthias.

Matthias is dark in color. I would initially say that he is black, but I have seen so much of him, that I can see that he is not so much black, as he is a mixture of very dark shades of every color. At first glance, though, he looks black. But then you get to his face. Just when you think he cannot get any darker, you see his eyes and matching mouth, and you see the fallacy of thinking Matthias is black. His eyes are so black, that when you look into them, you get the feeling that you are looking into the universe. Not the feeling of awe at the size and beauty of the universe, but instead the fear that comes from the idea that the universe is infinite, and at any time this rock of a planet we live on could fall, and we would fall forever. Fear from looking down, and seeing nothing, but darkness and void and your stomach knots up and your throat tightens. Yes, Matthias has black eyes, save for the tiny pinholes that are his pupils, which are glaringly white compared to the infinite blackness around them.

Then you see his mouth. His mouth is just teeth. There are no lips or gums; there are only teeth. His teeth are sharp and jagged, and they do not align, preventing Matthias from closing his mouth. So it is always open, and always curved up his skull in a smile that does not make you comfortable at all. Matthias has no nose, ears, or hair to speak of. His neck slopes down into sharp shoulders, which yield his arms.

Matthias has arms that are entirely too long and skinny. His elbows are sharp and bony, like his shoulders. The worst part of his arms are his hands. His hands have elongated, skinny fingers, which are not fingers at all. They bend like ours do, but they end in sharp points, like claws, except they are not claws in that it is just his fingers. His fingers are sharp, but upon closer examination, end in such a point, they look like hypodermic needles.

Below Matthias' arms is nothing. His body ends in a chest, which has no remarkable resemblance to a human chest. His body just tapers off, finally becoming as skinny as a dark thread, which connects to my head.

Before the death of my first aunt in August, Matthias stayed relatively small. He preferred to stay around my feet, dodging my steps as I went about my usual routine. Then with the funeral, came Matthias clawing up my leg, and eventually landed himself a spot near my shoulder, where he has stayed since then. He had stayed small for the most part, until my second aunt died earlier this month. With my grievances came his growth. Matthias is now the size of a person from his chest up, the rest of him still tapering into the thread that keeps him connected to my mind. He no longer has to perch on my shoulder to stay with me; he now just kind of floats along wherever I go. His presence is not a privilege, however.

Matthias has a bad habit of talking too much. He does not talk very loudly, but he definitely talks. He likes to curl his snake-like body around mine, and rest on my shoulder, his teeth inches from my ear whispering. This is not a big deal, and I can withstand his whispering. However, I do not particularly like how he is when I am upset.

When I get upset, Matthias gets excited. I keep to myself, and distance myself from my friends and loved ones. This is not healthy, but it is

just what I do. Matthias loves this. Whenever my mind is weak from being upset, and I am all alone, I am pretty much giving him the floor. Matthias gets tons of energy, and he winds his body around mine like always. Except, he twists around me too tightly. Especially around my chest and neck, he squeezes me like a demon constrictor, forcing me to only be able to breathe in short, shallow pants. Matthias whispers like usual, but his words come out in icy-cold breaths against my skin, shooting chills down my spine, and making my whole body shake. Matthias likes to reach down my arms and grab my hands, lacing his sharp fingers through mine from the back of my hand, resting the needle-sharp points onto the soft meaty part of my hand right before my wrist. In Matthias' excitement, his grip is a little too tight, puncturing my flesh and drawing small beads of blood.

All of this I can ignore and forgive. Matthias is just a little excited. However, I cannot ignore his icy words that he whispers. In my weakness, Matthias draws strength, and he never neglects to tell me so. I could go on and on about what Matthias says, but I get the feeling he would not particularly like that. His words make me feel less than human, and a complete burden on my family and friends. In short, I do not deserve to live anymore, but I am so worthless that I also do not deserve the privilege of death.

So I will be sitting, curled in on myself, gasping for air and respite from Matthias. However, let's look at what is happening in the eyes of someone else. There are no hypodermic needles stuck into my hand, but instead my nails pressed into my hand as I make fists so tight, my knuckles are white. There is no serpentine body twisted around my throat; there is only my gasping for breaths as I am stuck in the throngs of a panic attack. My body does not shake because there are arctic winds being breathed onto my neck, but instead because my mental weakness is being projected into my physical being, and my grief and stress are manifesting in my trembling. There is not a row of teeth whispering my worthlessness into my ear. There are no pitch black eyes peering through me and into my very soul. There is only me, stuck

in the middle of an anxiety attack, thinking dark and unreal things that are both depressing and disturbing.

As simple as it may seem to pretend that I have a being named Matthias causing me torture, there is not. I have an anxiety disorder and manic depression. My conditions are mentally exhausting and destructive, and I feel like I am at my wit's end. I am so desperate to understand my conditions, that I have made them into this monster in my own mind. And as much as both you, and undeniably I, want this to have a happy ending, it does not. There is no break, and there is no magic to make this all go away. There is no epiphany that I reach to make this all understandable and livable. There is only Matthias.

Bare Minerals of Love

Olivia Hadams

Arriving on the stoop of one's heart
Patiently waiting, grinning while anticipating an answer;
Some may lazily approach the door
Frozen, by their own mind
Inquiries chip through the stone barrier
Wondering...
Whether to live without or risk everything
Sink or Swim
The chance is now
But who really knows how to love?
Like wind, a strong feeling,
Yet negating the unveiling of intentions or direction
Not mentioning the negatives
As a rose smells sweet and appeals without effort
Likewise, a prick to the heart promises mortality...
Only souls capable of loving and welcoming love
Can add worth to valuable heart-shaped glass gems
A concept far beyond reason and logic
On the porch of life, where permanent changes,
Continuing to gently tap on the door,
Love stands happily on the concrete foundation
Not requesting money or material

Just suggesting spending time
Giving time to feel, letting it be known that
Love is Real
Whether the door opens matters not to Love,
For Love is prepared
To live, laugh and rejoice
Having faith,
You made the right choice.

Plastic

Madison Croom

Two faces.
One all perfect smiles and good intentions.
Shiny hard plastic.
The second, all consuming rage and anger.
Dangerous and unpredictable.

The delusion of perfection
Ever present, no one knows…
That is no one except for me.
But when I speak up,
When I seek help,
No one believes…
Because they haven't seen
Anything,
But the cold shiny plastic.

Behind closed doors
The mask comes off.
It is thrown down,
Shattering the illusion.
No more perfect smiles,

No more happy faces.
Just seething anger and pent-up aggression.
Just screaming and bullying to stay in control.

But wait, what's that?
A knock on the door…
A face in the window…
Someone looking in on my own personal hell?
Perhaps my help has finally come,
NOPE, go back to being plastic.
Always Plastic.

Dear No One

Ariel Landry

I saw myself today—nestled in the depths of my burdens, weeping. Why must this go on? Do their vile looks and grotesque snickers hold more prominence? I thought this ceased to exist for me. For after all, I believed it once before—believed I wore a skin as thick as elephant hide. It seems those layers whittled away, effortlessly, over time with the unforgiving lash of harsh remarks. I cannot fathom it, the way one surrenders their worth at the death grip of intruders. Ruthless beasts who will gladly stain the lives of the insecure without so much as a second glance. It has been proven that their words are far heavier than they should be. Ranked far more than the testimony of my own. Oh, how I ruined myself over cruel, meaning less expressions. Not even the compassionate words of my loved ones console me. It is difficult to feel like someone when one is forced to feel like no one, and they made damn sure of that.

How can I laugh at someone else's cross?

Stephanie Allen

A row of saved souls
Grimly stood strict and saintified
Gazing upon the astray site
Cowering within his lowly mind
Shouting away at his sins
Whose offerings were being rejected again & again
Like redemption was too afraid to say this man's name

In my childish adult-size mind
I laughed at what seemed like a mindless crime
For I had no clue of the shame
He was being forced to explain
How could I understand?

His involuntary pain
Was being use to maim
For I wasn't the lost soul on trial
In addition to the fact I was not walking his mile
Furthermore it was the word! That word! That was the nail in his cross!
And then I realized I was the one who was truly lost

Feel

Madison Croom

Free falling,
That's what it feels like.

Blood rushing,
Heart pounding,
Nerves electrified.

Falling in love,
That's what it feels like.

Insecurities vanish,
Tears stop falling,
Broken pieces are put together.

Finding your soul mate,
That's what it feels like.

Feeling complete.
Realizing that you aren't alone.
Knowing what it is to be whole.

Realizing that your life has been better
Since the day that you found them,
That's what it feels like.

Drowning,
That's what it feels like.

Heart racing,
Head pounding,
Lungs burning for air.

Falling apart,
That's what it feels like.

Being let down,
Because you let your hopes get too high.

Losing a piece of yourself,
Letting go because there is no other option.

Trying to justify all the pain,
"Well, he deserved better anyway…"
And crying yourself to sleep because you know you'll never be the same.

Breaking your own heart,
That's what it feels like.

If You Let Me

Dakota Newman

I know you're broken,
But I'm broken too.
We can heal each other,
Touch by touch,
Word by word,
Caress by caress.

I'll touch your heart,
I'll put it back together again.
Piece by piece,
If you let me.

I'll polish your heart with my tears
Until it shines again,
Until you can feel again,
Bleed again.
If you'll let me.

I'll break my heart to fix yours.
I'll give you parts of me to let you heal.
I'll show you what real love is.

I'll give you a piece,
A half,
A whole,
All of me,
If that's what you need.
I'll bleed to make your heart beat.
Pour my blood,
My life source, into you,
To let you live.
I'll give you all of me to let you feel loved again,
If you let me.

Rainy Love

Ktira Hadams

Cover US in rain
God's tears only resemble how beautiful it is to be cleansed
Drip, drip, dripping drops of sacrificial dew
Giving rise to growth
Rise up on Sunday morning and feel Jesus kiss you with each moist touch
Holy water
Slowly, gently, baptizing us,
Water goblets overflowing with King's blood
Poured through cloudy strainers down to Earth In order to renew
Lost souls, eagerly leaping into puddles, mudding up the Truth
Young fools in search of green treasure coves, never reach the other side
Which was more GOLD than GREEN could ever be
Love, is sprinkled and plopped in my eye,
Crowning my vision beautiful
Glasses see clearer when rain magnifies its focus
And lovers always indulge in life's simple pleasures
Fogging spirit windows, producing warped realities of what rainy love is all about
Days dedicated to warm movies and Sunday afternoon cuddling
Hot cocoa and popcorn Samba, dancing in celebration of soul mates
Wet pecks every now and then validate sincerity
Laying heads on chests, listening to heartbeats resembling the pitter patter of rain
Thank God for love in the rain
For without Jesus,
All love would not be the same.

My Privy Universe

James Huss

The sun will dawn upon the dewy blades
At morn no matter when I view your face;
His rays will blaze at noon without a care
How soon again I see your raven hair.

The moon at dusk will light the darkened land
Unmoved that I have yet to hold your hand,
And when the birds resume their chirp, she'll slip
Away aloof to your unblemished lip.

The stars will sing the myths of ancient men
If never once I touch your tender skin;
Archaic gods in constellations meet
Despite my ear's desire to hear you speak.

But if your aspect not anon I gaze,
My privy universe to black will fade.



Allen Allemand
"Close and Personal"
Photography Honorable Mention



Kaitlyn Albert
"Details Aren't Important"
Photography 3rd Place Award



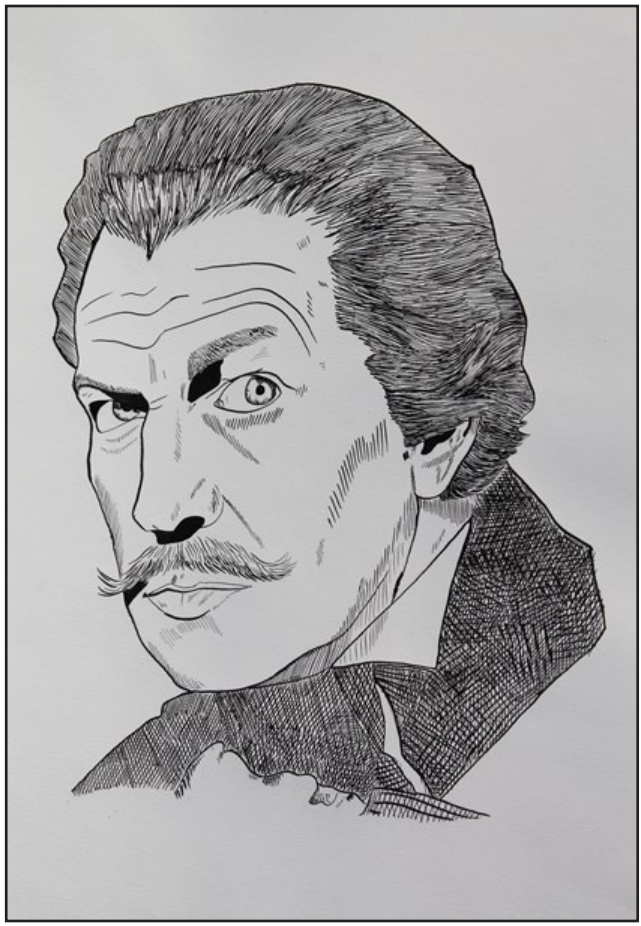
Heather Mathis
"Gold"
Photography 2nd Place Award



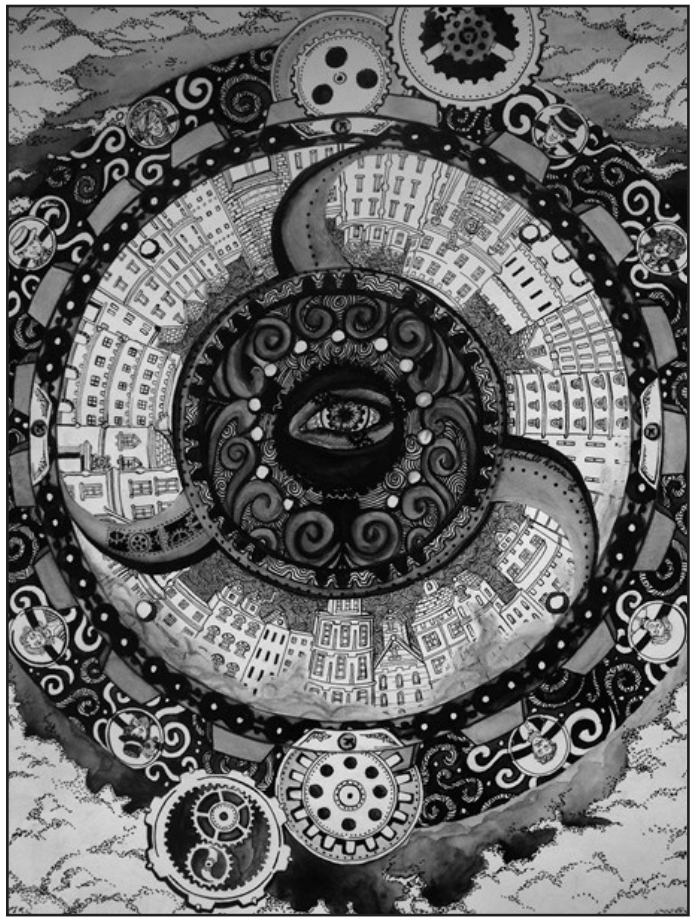
Tra'Van R. Cooper
"Unseen"
Photography 1st Place Award



Tyra Morrison
"Anonymous"
Fine Art Honorable Mention



Hannah Fulton
"Vinnie"
Fine Art 3rd Place Award



Richelle Dorris
"Observe"
Fine Art 2nd Place Award



Jacklyn Marr
"Child at Heart"
Fine Art 1st Place Award

Ocean of Tears

Alyssa Braud

The St. Aloysius church bells ring at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, November 14th, 2009. I rub my arms vigorously as I try to keep warm in the damp sixty-degree weather. Gray clouds blanket the sky, and thick fog rolls over the city. My mother and I are emotionally connected and even more so today as we walk side by side taking cautious steps into the church along with everyone else who treasured Mrs. Debbie's life. I walk as if one wrong step will drag me deep into reality, forcing me to feel the emotions of my surroundings. For the past five days it has been a battle as I try to hold on.

Last Monday, two years of built-up emotion, like a volcano about to erupt, came pouring out in a waterfall of hurt during science class. It was the only time I have ever cried at school. The shock of pain in my heart caused me to search my surroundings for any eye that might have spotted me.

"What's wrong?" Mrs. Freeman wondered.

"My friend's mother has breast cancer, and is in the hospital," I sobbed, barely audible.

"I'm so sorry."

Later that day, when I arrived home, my mother stood beneath the narrow white doorframe of our kitchen with a haunted look on her face. I noticed her eyes were as red and swollen as mine were. She explained Mrs. Debbie had slipped into a coma that morning. With an ache in my heart and a lump in my throat, my brain attempted to

process what I had been told.

Suddenly, my mother squeezes my hand and I am sucked back into reality. My sweaty palms grip the back of the pew in an effort to hold onto my sanity and keep the burning in my eyes where it belongs. Every second begins to feel endless as I stand still letting my mind wander, distract itself, and protect me from the depressing atmosphere. I concentrate on the silky black material of my friend's dress— the way it folds, the way it shines, and the way it flows as my friends advance down the aisle.

Why do the generous and caring always die young?

Now my friends must live their teenage years and adult lives without a mother.

This thought takes me back to the summer of 2007. It was a time of innocence, when I never thought that something so tragic could happen to a loved one. It was one of those let's-swim-every-chance-we-get summers. The sun blazed down and turned my friend's skin brown, and mine, well, red. The sweat poured down our faces like we were in a sauna, while trying to feel relief in the cool water of the swimming pool. We decided to make a compromise and only swim at night. Mrs. Debbie and my mom were talking about feeling "old" and all the problems they had at the moment. My friends and I laughed at them, not thinking for one second that Mrs. Debbie's particular problems were not from age, but from breast cancer.

It was her daughter's glorious eleventh birthday when she received the dreadful results from her first mammogram in the past two years. An exam which was prompted by various aches and pains that never seemed to cease. Breast cancer had spread like a wildfire through her entire body.

The next weekend, my friends and I were dancing at a nursing home to bring an uplifting brightness to the faces of the frail residents. In the open, white dressing room, I sat on the gray, rough carpet talking to my friends when Mrs. Debbie came in carrying a blue costume covered in glimmering rhinestones. As I watched her with thoughtful eyes, my gaze fell to the floor. The room became small and seemed enveloped by darkness. I noticed a chill in my blood as my mind reeled at possibilities upwelling from the depths of my soul.

What is it like to know your mother has cancer?
This could happen to my mother.
What if she died from cancer?
What would I do without my mom in my life?
I can't bear to think about losing her.

My awareness slowly wanders back into the church as the minister begins the eulogy. Close friends pour their hearts out, but Mrs. Debbie's daughters have a glazed-over stare. The pearly pink, closed casket is rolled down the aisle by my friends and their dad. Once the casket reaches the front of the church, my friends have trouble pulling their hands away as if stuck to a coating of honey. Knowing she is lying peacefully in the casket brings back memories of the last time I saw her.

Six days before the funeral, I watched a dance performance at the small, beaten-down Baton Rouge Little Theater with my friend and my mother. After the performance, we drove to the Baton Rouge General Hospital. The smell of sanitizer and bleach filled my nostrils while I quickly walked through the entrance. Vibrations shot through my body, from my head to my toes, while riding in the stainless steel elevator up to the oncology center. Ding. The elevator doors creaked open, and we strode briskly to room 263. My heart pounded faster. The door to the darkened room opened quietly and Mrs. Debbie lay in a white, plastic looking bed on the left side of the room. Her eyes were

closed, but she moved her head side to side, struggling to open them and observe her surroundings. My friend went to her mother, shook her lightly, and pleaded for her to open her eyes for a glimpse of her family. When it was time to leave, we all strained our voices in an effort to whisper goodbye and my friend told her mother she loved her.

"Sweet Potato," her mother mumbled.

I did not realize these would be the last words I would ever hear her speak.

That Wednesday, November 11th, 2010, on Veterans Day at 7:00 a.m., her soul escaped her disease-filled body and became the energy that surrounds us. Unfortunately, cancer won this battle, leaving an ocean of tears on the battlefield.

Now we stand together in the church like brick walls for support, not letting one another fall into the deep, dark place of nothing. My friends sing and give a tribute for their mother, without a single tear shed. They know she wanted her life to be celebrated, not mourned.

When the eulogy is over, we follow the long, black hearse to the burial place at Resthaven. Overlooking a breathtaking scene of natural beauty, atop a hill, she is laid to rest in a coffin fitting of her sparkling personality. The minister talks somberly and roses of pure white and velvety red are set on top of the casket to show love from the people she knew. Dew trickles down the roses, slowly dropping onto the casket as tears do the same on our faces.

I sit down beside my friends thinking of everything, but nothing at the same time. All I can say is "I love you."

Is this all a bad dream?

Grief flows throughout my body. I know it is real, and I will never see Mrs. Debbie's joyful smile again; the kind of smile that brightens up a whole room and makes you just naturally smile back. I look over at my mom and our eyes lock. Suddenly I realize life and relationships are as fragile as a glass vase and I must appreciate every moment I have with my mother.

Speak for Objects

Elizabeth King

I'll be used by you
At your convenience I stay right in the palm of your hand
Yet I rest close to your mind you think of me
When the wind has defeated you
Taking the mass of the day from dusk until dawn
I find your palm and then you use me
Brief sometimes long place me in closed dark spaces
Until you want to put your finger on
I'll be used by you
And then you'll pass me on to your friends
And let them use me over and over again
I make you perfect
Even if pain comes
You'll still find me working
I'm worth it
I'll be used by you
Just like I was used by those of the past
I'll see generations to come
I'll rest close to their minds
Fine strands of beautiful death in my teeth
And even if I can't come through they'll force me
Push harder as if to break me like those before me
I'll be used by them
At their convenience I'll stay at the palm of their hands
I'll be used by them
Just like I am being used by you.
Sincerely,
The Comb.

Hair

Katie Rayburn

I watched the wind
Tussle her hair.
I watched the waves
Roll from her scalp.
Envy surfaced,
But for moment,
Just a moment.
Envy turned to
Wonder and more.
I loved the locks
So carefully
Clean and lengthy.
The chocolate
Color was warm
And inviting.
The wind tempted
Those eyes looking.
Envy tried to
Surface again,
And anyone
Else would have fallen
To temptation.

Yet I waited
With my patience,
And I learned love
And love of things
Full of beauty.
Hair of soft silk,
Hair I wanted,
And I admired.
God made something
So beautiful,

And here we choose
To hate his work.